

THE

Triumph of Truth,

IN THE

CONVERSION

OF THE

REV. J. A. MASON,

FROM THE

ERRORS

OF

M E T H O D I S M

TO THE

CATHOLIC FAITH.

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

To the Greeks and to the Barbarians, to the wise and to the unwise, I am a debtor.

For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto Salvation.

ROM. i. 14, 16.

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AN ADDRESS

TO THE

SENSIBLE AND CANDID

OF

ALL DENOMINATIONS.

Whatever changes may take place in the civil or religious relations of life, they are of small importance when abstracted from the general interests of the human race, and from those awful responsibilities in which the whole family of Adam stands to the great Creator and Sovereign Lord of all things. Separated from these considerations, it is of little consequence who I am, or what I am. Whether rich or poor; learned or illiterate. Whether my religion be Heathen or Jewish; Mahomedan or Christian; Protestant or Catholic: It is all the same. My being is ephemeral; my glory or ignominy is momentary; I live for myself alone, and the whole importance of my history will be told in these few words—He lived and he died:

Not so, when considered as a moral agent, and in connexion with the public weal. "No man liveth for himself, and no man dieth to himself." This consideration stamps eternal importance on the character and conduct of the meanest individual. He lives for the service of God and his country, and he dies under the responsibilities of his moral agency in each department of his conduct through life. In every man, therefore, we behold the model to imitate, or the beacon to shun; and it is in this light, and in this light alone, that my conduct partakes of any importance.

But, viewed in this light, the change which has taken place in my religious relations is of infinite consequence to me and to every human being. If I am right, Protestants are wrong; and vice versa, if Protestants are right, I am wrong. To guide us in this dilemma, there must be some plain rule, capable of giving infallible certainty—this a divine revelation supposes. To find out this rule is both our duty and our interest; and whether I or you neglect it, we must merit for ourselves condemnation. "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be condemned." I hope, therefore, you will bring to the reading of this little work a candid and upright mind; a mind open to conviction, and resolved to follow the track of truth. For myself, as far as I know myself, I am conscious that for no consideration in the world would I profess or promote the Catholic religion, but from that conviction which I feel of its divine origin, authority, and truth. Could I, by professing it obtain all the gold of Golconda, or the wealth of the South Sea dream; nay, could the universe pour its treasures at my feet, what would it avail me, when compared with eternity, and the infinite loss of my immortal soul? You and I, Christian brethren, stand upon the verge of

this eternal state—upon every pulsation depends an infinite joy or an endless wo. And, oh! how important the inquiry!

Am I prepared? Is my religion that which Jesus Christ revealed to his Church, and commanded her to teach to the world; saying, he that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me. He that believeth what I have commanded you to teach shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be condemned?

Under these impressions, Christian brethren, I trust I shall so write, and you so read, that we may "all meet in the unity of the faith, and knowledge of the Son of God . . . That henceforth we be no more as children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the wickedness of men, by cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive. But doing the truth in charity, we may in all things grow up in him who is the head, even Christ. From the whole body (viz. of his Church) compacted and fitly joined together, by what every joint supplieth, according to the operation of the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in charity." Ephes. iv. 13-16.

I remain, Christian Brethren,

Your ever obedient Servant in Christ,

J. A. MASON.

Stourbridge, Sept. 29, 1827.

P. S.—A pamphlet has just been put into my hands, by a Protestant Gentleman, with the following remarks: "Sir, this pamphlet is written by Mr. Jewett, of Wolverhampton, against your Shaver; but the man is no gentleman, it is all abuse." I had been informed of this before by another gentleman, who asked me if I had seen it; I answered, No. He said such a book was in existence but not worth any answer. I have read the book, and Mr. Jewett does not attempt any argument; it is all worse than abuse, for it is personal defamation. I assure this man I look down upon his vile insinuations with sovereign contempt; and as a man upon a rock laughs at the mountain surge, I laugh at his impotent spleen. At the same time, I rejoice that the end of the Shaver is accomplished. That pamphlet has been pronounced unanswerable, but I never said it was so; however, Mr. Jewett's pamphlet is the best argument I have seen of its unanswerable efficacy. One grand design of the Shaver was to make Mr. Chettle speak out what he was whispering behind the curtain. This he durst not do—but he has set Mr. Jewett, a man I never saw, and of whom, before this, I knew nothing, to do that act which even John Chettle was ashamed to do. I shall notice it as it deserves when I have time.

I also find it necessary to notify, that all letters, not post paid, will be returned unopened, except from the well known hands of my friends or necessary correspondents.

THE CONVERSION.

GOD," says the great Apostle of the Gentiles, when speaking of the efficient cause of our vocation to the faith—"God who commanded light to shine in darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

This passage is equally explanatory of the cause of his own conversion to the Christian faith, who before was so strongly attached to the law of Moses—and of my conversion to the same faith as taught by the Catholic church, who before was so prejudiced in favour of Methodism. And, I am convinced, no arguments, however strong, no disputation, however ably conducted, nor any dispositions, however favourable to conversion they may appear, will ever lead to a successful issue, unless God touch the heart by his holy grace, and the subject faithfully correspond with its divine influence.

As to myself, I have nothing wherein to glory, except in my infirmities, that the grace of God may be magnified in me. "What hast thou that thou hast not received," inquires an apostle; "and if thou hast received it, why dost thou glory? For of him, and by him, and in him, are all things, to whom be glory for ever and ever, Amen." Viewing God, therefore, as the primary source of all my good, I can only lay my hand upon my heart and say, "Not unto me, not unto me, O Lord, but unto thy name be the glory."

I was originally, to use the style of the same apostle, a Methodist of the Methodists, being born of Methodistical parents, and having been instructed in, and deeply imbued with, their principles from my earliest infancy. The constant example of my parents, and the conversation of the preachers and others who frequently visited us, made an indelible impression on my tender mind, and laid the foundation of future association and habits, which grew with my growth, and strengthened with my strength, forming a second nature, and producing an impenetrable barrier against every assailant of my religious principles. Such was the influence of my moral feelings, from the early age of four to eight years, that I was pronounced in a justified state. Not, indeed, because I was supposed to have retained my baptismal innocency, for Methodists know nothing of this doctrine, and believe nothing of it, although Mr. Wesley both believed

and taught it, but because I was regenerated by the Holy Ghost, and was constituted his temple.

At this early period I felt an unconquerable inclination to books, and to every thing connected with the ministry of the Methodists, which, from its then infant zeal and simplicity, I conceived to be the only true one. I often conversed with my play-mates on religious subjects, from which I acquired the name of the Preacher, the Parson, &c. I took pleasure in being thus called, and, when alone, I employed my time in constructing pulpits, and imitating the preachers. It will be easily seen from these characteristic traits, how closely Methodism was riveted to my heart, and its doctrines were ingrafted in my nature. I make these observations to shew that my conversion to the Catholic religion was not of one indifferent or unaccustomed to any religious system, but of one naturally and habitually a Methodist, and zealously devoted to it as the religion of my father—I cannot say fathers, for Methodism had just made its appearance in the world. Although these impressions were never obliterated from my mind, yet, as I grew up, their influence was considerably counteracted by the allurements of the world, and the warmth of my youthful passions; so that I was considered as fallen from a justified state, and indeed fallen I was, for I completely lost my baptismal innocency. However, in all the gaiety and volatility of youth, the same principles predominated in my breast, and if I respected, professed, or promoted any religion, it was Methodism. About the age of twenty-one I began to think seriously of reforming my life, and could easily state the circumstances, were they material to the object of this work. The question has been repeatedly put to me—by some with kindness by others in a very different spirit—were you justified? And an argument has been drawn, that, if I was not justified, my conversion to the Catholic faith can involve no imputation on Methodism, since I cannot be said to be a proper judge of that which I never knew. I admit this argument in all its force, and I distinctly assert *I was* justified in the sense in which Methodists understand it. But I deny that they understand either the nature of justification or the conditions for obtaining it. Nevertheless, for the information of such as ask these questions, I again say—in every sense in which they are justified, so was I. Did they pass days, and weeks, and months in the pangs of the new birth? So did I. Did they weep and mourn and cry? So did I. Did they for faith incessant try? So did I.

Can they point out some gate or stile, or corner sly,
Where the spirit drawing nigh,
Wiped the tear and hushed the sigh,
And said, "thou art forgiven?" So can I.

O yes! I can tell of breaking chains—snapping fetters—being delivered from my prison house—clad in robes of righteousness—and exalted into the regions of light, life, and liberty. I believed myself justified just as much as they believe themselves to be, and I knew myself justified just as much as they know it, and I defy them to bring evidence to the contrary. No one of my friends or companions ever doubted it, and the events which followed proved it.

I was soon raised to be a Prayer-maker, then an Exhorter; finally a Preacher and Class-leader. Ten years I have given them my labours gratis, and in all the circuits where I have laboured, I never neglected my part, or brought scandal on my religion. On the contrary, numbers can rise up and declare they have been benefited by my ministry. Several of the preachers can trace their spiritual benefit to me—and there is one young man, now an itinerate preacher, who remembers well the days of former times, and rejoices that he had the lot to know me. And over that young man—that dear friend of my younger days—my heart bleeds and is disconsolate; I never think of him but with mixed emotions of affection and sorrow. O that God would be propitious to my prayer! Then would I joyfully lay down my head upon a dying pillow, and sing in the language of holy Simeon, "*Nunc dimittis servum tuum Domne secundum verbum tuum in pace, quia viderunt oculi mei salutare tuum.*" Now, O Lord, lettest thou thy servant die in peace, for my eyes have seen thy salvation."

Pardon candid reader, my plaintive soliloquy—if I feel for my friend, it is because he has been, and still is, dear to me—and if I speak of myself, it is only to vindicate my character from the malignant and unjust aspersions of my enemies, to whom I have done no wrong but that of worshipping my God according to the dictates of my conscience.

After I had thrown off the mantle of my nonage and assumed the character of a man, and above all of a Methodist Preacher, I began to think something like a divine, and feel something like a divine, although but a divine of Methodism. I soon discovered apparent failings in the system, discrepancies in its creed, and an utter want of unity either of doctrine or affection with other Protestants.

Methodist preachers often boast of a cordial union with other sects; but this is mere pretence to hide their designs and accomplish their purposes. They dislike the Church of England because she is too Popish and possess too much of the good things of this life, which they could wish to share; they have a cordial antipathy against the Calvinists, because they oppose their Pelagian principles and enthusiastic pretensions; they hate the Unitarians, because they laugh at their visionary notions; and they despise the Kilhamites and Ranters, because they are chips of the old block—schismatics, forsooth, and heretics from the mother church. I speak as deliberately and advisedly as Mr. Jewett, and without any motive for misrepresentation. There is no sect so narrow-minded, so illiberal, so prejudiced against their fellow-Protestants, and possessed of such indefinite notions of religious liberty, as the Methodist preachers, and those who imbibe their spirit; but, were they ever in power, they would be the first to restrict it, and the last to promote it. I saw something of this spirit, and felt something of it in myself, and I could only reconcile it with reason and justice, by supposing that Methodism was the only true religion, and all the world besides schismatics from the church and corrupters of the faith. This was the opinion I sincerely formed, and I acted upon it accordingly. There was only one thing which materially tended to shake my principles, and that was, the very modern date of Methodism—that she was the child of yesterday, the bantling of Mr. Wesley and his mother.*

I have preserved from destruction some private thoughts written by me on this subject, dated August 31, 1814, nearly five years before I became a Catholic, which shew the difficulties I found, and my mode of reconciling them. "All dissent (I argued) from the church of God is unjustifiable, unless we can substantiate an essential reason, and it can be no less than dangerous, if not damnable, schism. What then are my reasons for being a Methodist? Will it suffice to say I was born of Methodistical parents? Certainly not. For if the Church of England, which is the main body of professing Christians in this country, be the church of God, it becomes my duty, now I am arrived at the years of dis-

* Mr. Wesley never could be brought to allow of lay-preaching till Thomas Maxwell began. This took place while he was on his tour through the societies. On his return his mother told him that Thomas had begun to preach. Mr. Wesley was indignant, but his inspired mother replied—"John, Thomas Maxwell has as much call to preach as you." This said, he hears him himself and approves it to.

cretion, to return to the bosom of that church from which my father dissented, unless I find an essential cause for dissent. For the church of God has a sanctity attached to it, which calls for our respect and veneration ; and it is necessary that it should be so, or we must admit the idea, that every capricious mind has a right to exalt himself against the church, and become the founder of a new sect ; and if we sanction this principle in the first instance, we must, to be consistent, follow it up till every individual becomes different in faith and communion from the rest of mankind, and thus scatter every religious body, and banish all unity of faith and church communion from the earth." I then proceeded to state, for my own satisfaction, what appeared to me to be just grounds for dissent. "Allseparation from the church must be founded on necessity, of cause, propriety of means, and utility of effect. I need not prove Methodism to be founded on necessity, for all who are acquainted with its origin know it to have been necessary, unless we are told that it ought not to exist under any circumstances ; and to prove this they must prove that the church cannot err, and that Mr. Wesley had not the same divine call to preach the gospel as the rest of the clergy, which no one can prove. If, therefore, he had this call, and was prevented from exercising it in the church, he was bound in conscience to exercise it wherever he could get an audience. No man can dispense with his call to preach the gospel ; for a dispensation of the gospel being committed unto him—'Wo to him if he preach it not.' But Mr. Wesley was expelled from the church by a wicked clergy, and therefore they are the Dissenters, and Mr. Wesley and the Methodists are the true church of God." I carried the argument much farther, shewing the means used for establishing Methodism to be proper, that, its effects were beneficial, and I concluded that it was a mercy that I was a Methodist, and, by the grace of God, would continue so.

I have quoted this document to show that I thought seriously of these things, long before I knew any thing of the Catholic religion, and that I had some idea of the necessity of unity of faith and church communion. But I erred in supposing there was no infallibility or authority in the church to judge of the doctrine of its ministers, or to suspend their functions. I forgot that the right of private judgment was the foundation of Protestantism, and that this gives to every man the right to violate every system of faith and communion whatever. I forgot that there was no general unity

of faith even in Methodism, and that the right I defended in Mr. Wesley, Mr. Kilham had assumed to violate the peace of Methodism. I forgot that, while I pleaded for unity, I gave the church no power by which that unity could be effected. I forgot that, although a divine vocation is necessary for the ministry, yet God never gives this vocation but in harmony with the economy of his church, and that "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not *the God* of dissension, but of peace." 1 Cor. xiv. 32, 33. Finally, I forgot, that if the fact of one man leaving the church, and lifting up his voice against her, and that without any divine testimonial that his authority was divine, could annul the prior authority of the church, and become himself the only authority, carrying the church with him, then he must be supposed the only true Christian, and the sanctity, authority, and security of all churches would be annulled and destroyed. Thus I was sincerely poking my way after truth in the dark; I saw its glimmerings at a distance, but its temple I could not find. However, it will be seen in what manner I satisfied my conscience, and why I clung with fond embraces to the sect in which I had been born, till the providential moment in which I met with my Rev. Friend, through whose instrumentality I was converted to the Catholic faith. In the mean time several circumstances transpired, which it will be more in order to explain when I notice the scurrilities and falsehoods of Mr. Jewett.

These circumstances served to expose some of the defects of the system, but could not and did not shake my attachment to the general cause. For I argued thus: If Methodism be not the church of God, where can I find it? Of the Catholic Church I knew nothing, except its far proclaimed idolatry, superstition, ignorance, folly, tyranny, cruelty and wickedness. Had any man at this time told me I should become a Catholic, I would have turned from him with pity or disgust, as either thinking me deranged or as being so himself. And if I looked into any other sect, I found no common faith or congeniality of faith which could induce me to embrace it. I therefore continued to clasp her image to my heart, (I beg their pardon, I hope they will not be offended at my idolatry), and exclaimed—Methodism, with all thy faults I love thee! Besides my natural affection for the young lady's image—if I looked at my family, they were all Methodists, even to image worship—if I looked at my commerce, this was principally among

the worshippers of the image of this Diana—all my friends, with whom I was on terms of the closest intimacy, for I am very susceptible of tender friendships, were all high-priests, or priests, or devotees of the goddess. Often did I proclaim her praises from the stool or rostrum ; and often did we sing in mutual concert—"Strong is the power, and excellent are the virtues, and universal shall be the glory and the praise of our great and mighty Diana." But how mysterious are the ways of Divine Providence? Truly it may be said—"He rides upon the whirlwind, and his footsteps are in the deep waters." We can sometimes look after him, but his face we cannot see. So much of the chain of events as we do discover proves that all his ways are perfect, and all his works are done in truth. But the remainder is hidden in the clouds of mystery, which we cannot and ought not to attempt to explore.

How little thought I at this period, that in a few years I should abandon a cause which had been the pride of my life to support, and for which I was ready to exhaust all the energies of body and mind. And how much farther still was it from my thoughts that I should become a professor of that religion which of all others I hated—a member of that Church which of all others I feared—and a priest of those very altars which above all others I despised and detested. Truly may I say, "I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and contumelious;" but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. O God, I thank thee that thou hast deigned to look upon me, who am less than the least of all thy servants, and given me this grace that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Mr. Jewett has noticed two circumstances, which he thinks reflects dishonour on me ; these circumstances will also be laid open, when I have leisure to notice him, and documents referred to which will throw the shadow the contrary way, and, if not blind, will certainly throw him (Mr. Jewett) in the dark. What I admire is, the evident hand of God in preventing those steps which might have rendered my conversion impracticable. For very likely the circumstances could not have existed which produced it ; and I have this opinion, that scarcely any other person than my Rev. Friend, Mr. Martyn, could have brought it to a final issue.

The work, however, is done—it is completely done—and, what is more, it is eternally done, unless a wiser man than I have ever yet found can demonstrate my error, and then I

hope I shall follow the maxim—"It is wiser to acknowledge an error than to persist in it."

My object now is to show how this work was accomplished, And I entreat the reader's serious attention to the *Rule of Faith* which I shall lay down, as nearly as possible in the order in which it first made its impression on my mind. The language is my own, and my present views may add something to the chain of argumentation; but, as far as my notes and recollection serve me, the matter is substantially the same.

In the course of unforeseen events I was led to fix my residence at Walsall, where I continued to labour in the different parts of the Wednesbury circuit with pleasure to myself, and, I have reason to believe, with profit to others. In a short time I became acquainted with a neighbouring Catholic, whom I did not know to be such at first. I found in this person principles of honour and religion which claimed my esteem, and I conceived the design of converting him to Methodism. I took an opportunity of speaking to him on religious subjects, and then it was I discovered him to be a Catholic. I was much grieved, for, although I respected him for his virtues, I pitied him from my heart on account of his religion, and with still greater ardour laboured to convince him of his error. Soon after this, another circumstance took place, which caused me to enter more deeply into the controversy. I had engaged a servant maid, whose father was a Catholic, and herself had received some instructions in that religion. This I did not know at the time, and, according to my usual custom, made it a condition of her entering my family, that she should attend at the Methodist chapel. This she submitted to, observing "she supposed it was of little consequence at what place of worship a person attended if good was taught there." This is a very common *salvo* among Protestants much better educated than this poor maid, upon whom Catholic instructions appear to have had little effect; so true it is, that the things that are seen have a greater influence upon the human mind in general than those which are not seen; hence Protestants, however they may disapprove of the doctrines taught by a sect, yet, if interest renders it desirable for them to attend that ministry, they easily silence their conscience with the delusive hope that some good is taught there. O how dangerous is such practice! Upon this principle we may join with Heathens, Mahometans, Jews, or any other sect, when it will promote our interest. During the abode of this ser-

vant in my family, I had occasion to send her to the house of the above named gentleman; he no sooner saw her than he recognised her, inquired into the circumstance of her coming to live with me, spoke on the danger of her neglecting her religion, and inquired why he had not seen her lately at the Catholic chapel? The maid's answer was simple and honest: "I go, Sir, to the Methodist chapel." He remonstrated with her strongly, and his words had a powerful effect upon her mind. She came home and wept bitterly. To vindicate my religion, and repel an interference in my family affairs, I espoused her cause. This led to religious controversy, and the gentleman, fearing he might darken counsel with words without knowledge, referred the case to his pastor, the Rev. Francis Martyn.

I cannot suffer this opportunity to pass, without recording my disapprobation of my own conduct in this case, and of thousands of Protestants besides myself, who force servants to violate their conscience for a piece of bread. If a servant perform his duty to his employer, that is all the master ought to expect; his labour is his master's, but his soul is his God's. And, oh! what an awful account will such persons have to give at the dread tribunal of their Maker, in whose sight there is no distinction of persons! I am very credibly informed that a certain gentleman of the town of Stourbridge retains a Catholic servant on condition that he goes to church—Wo to that master! and wo to that servant too!

From the known zeal, fidelity, and perseverance with which Mr Martyn labours to fulfil every part of his pastoral duties, it may be expected that he would not suffer so favourable an opportunity of vindicating the cause of truth, and promoting the interests of religion, to pass unnoticed and unimproved. I consequently received from him an invitation to meet him at the house of the aforesaid person, to discuss this most important of all topics, **WHAT IS TRUTH—AND WHERE IS IT TO BE FOUND?** I felt considerable backwardness to meet Mr. Martyn, although I knew very little of his character at that time; but I considered that the cause of truth, the interests of religion, the spiritual welfare of my servant, my own honour and the honour of Methodism were involved; I therefore agreed to meet him, depending on the well-known maxim, "that truth to be admired needs only to be known;" and, as I believed my religion to be the truth, and the Catholic religion a compound of vice and folly—with the bible in my hand, and reason for my guide, I had little doubt of confounding my adversary, and placing truth

in so clear a light as to silence if not convert him. This was not the first time a Protestant has reckoned without his host, or error been confounded in the presence of truth.

The day appointed for our first meeting was on Whit Tuesday, 1818, and on that day my Rev. Friend and I first knew each other. We entered upon the subject which had brought us together, by stating and accepting certain preliminaries.

1. That, amidst the numerous sects of the present day, it was a point of the utmost importance to both of us, as teachers of opposite religions, to ascertain—What is the true Christian faith, and how is it to be distinguished and known.

2. That in pursuing this inquiry both should be candid, and place ourselves in a state of religious independence on the opinions of men, prejudices of education, or even on our own preconceived opinions.

3. That moderation, calmness, and respect for the character of each other should rule the discussion.

4. That on whatever side truth was found to that we would adhere.

My Rev. Friend took his stand on the very subject which had occupied my serious thoughts five years before, viz. the Unity and Unchangeableness of Truth, and proceeded to discuss the **RULE OF FAITH**.

If Jesus Christ, he said, came down from heaven to reveal a body of divine truths, by the belief of which mankind were to be saved, or by the disbelief of which they were to be condemned, according to that of *St. Matt.* xxviii. 19, 20, and *St. Mark*, xvi. 15, 16, then there must be some rule by which all men may be able to come to the knowledge of this faith, and that not only partially and obscurely, but with infallible certainty, *i. e.* without danger of being deceived. To this, after some objection on infallible certainty, I consented; because I conceived myself that the wisdom of God would never have revealed his truth, without designing to perpetuate it in the same entire manner in which he had first revealed it; and would never have commanded all to believe it under pain of condemnation, without giving them the means of knowing it and distinguishing it from error. The next point was, what was this rule appointed by Christ, for knowing this system of truth, whether the word of God as contained in the Scriptures—or, the word of God as taught by the Church of God?

My rev. friend stated the Catholic doctrine upon the subject, and defended it by natural arguments, supported by plain passages from the holy scripture.

The rule, he observed, which Jesus Christ had established for the knowledge and propagation of his religion, must evidently co-exist with it. For where would be the wisdom of establishing a code of laws, without a rule by which its meaning might be known? And this rule we find he did establish. While he himself was on earth, he was the only authoritative infallible rule necessary for explaining or enforcing the doctrines he taught, and had he continued with his church so that a final reference could have been made to him in any dispute, no other infallible tribunal would ever have been necessary. But, as this was not the economy of God, we find him, just before his departure from the world, investing his apostles with the same power and authority with which he had been invested by his divine Father. "All power," said the Son of God, "is given to me in heaven and on earth . . . as my Father hath sent me, so I send you." "Go ye into the whole world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be condemned."—*Mark*, xvi. 15, 16. "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations: baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and behold I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world."—*Matt.* xxviii. 19, 20. And St. John adds, that breathing upon them, he said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost, whose sins ye forgive they are forgiven, and whose sins ye retain they are retained."—*John*, xx. 22, 23. The apostles being thus constituted the first ministers of Christ and his church, they are also constituted the authority of Christ in the church, and their preaching made the rule of faith to the world, for the world is commanded to believe their teaching and preaching under pain of condemnation. The living voice therefore of the ministers of Christ was, from the beginning, the only rule of faith to Christians appointed by Jesus Christ.

MASON.—I assent to all you have said; I know well that truth is unchangeable, and I acknowledge the teaching of the apostles to have been the rule of faith to the first Christians. But I deny that all truth is essential to salvation; there are essentials and non-essentials. And I deny also, that the teaching authority of the successors so called of the apostles was designed to be the only rule of faith in after ages. The apostles foresaw by the inspiration of God the errors into which Christian teachers would fall, and wrote

the scripture for our instruction, that we might become wise unto salvation.

MARTYN.—Whether there be truths non-essential I shall not stop to inquire. It is evident that the whole of what Christ taught to his apostles and commanded them to teach to the world was essential, for he makes no distinction, but says, “teach all things whatsoever I have taught you.” Nor can you, Mr. Mason, suppose that the present differences in religion are about nonessentials. For instance, it cannot be a non-essential point whether Christ be God or not—whether he died for all mankind or not—whether the doctrines of the Catholic Church be true or false. For if the former be non-essential, why split and chide about them? and if the latter be non-essential, why are we met to discuss them? You deny that the teaching authority of the successors of the apostles continued to be the rule of faith contrary to the apostle himself. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (i. e. preached); for how shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall he preach, unless he be sent?” Now you must suppose, according to your own rule, that what the apostle here wrote was written for our instruction; and he tells us the rule of faith is hearing the word of God preached by those who are sent. Consequently he wrote to instruct us that the rule of our faith is not reading, but preaching; that therefore there must be preachers, and an authority to send them, without which mission these preachers ought not to be heard. Again, you suppose infallible authority ceased with the apostles. But St. Timothy was not an apostle, but a successor, and yet you hold him to be inspired; and St. Paul tells him to stir up, as the Protestant translation has it, “the grace given him by the imposition of his hands and those of the priesthood.” From which it is evident, the Holy Ghost was conferred by the imposition of hands to invest him with authority, and to enable him to dictate infallibly the word of God to the people. And St. Paul directs him to follow the same rule in committing the same authority to others—“Commit those things which thou hast heard of me to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” Here you see the same rule which the apostles followed continued in their successors.

MASON.—I deny that Timothy was infallible in the sense in which the apostles were infallible, for this reason—because the whole language of Paul proves that Timothy might fail of the grace given him. I acknowledge he was exhorted to

commit the same ministry to faithful men, but I deny that these men were rendered infallible. For the certainty of their ministry was to depend upon their own faithfulness. But I do not deny that there was a much greater certainty attending the ministry of those successors who were contemporary with the apostles, because they were connected with the living authority of the apostles.

MARTYN.—Was not the authority of the apostles rendered infallible by the descent of the Holy Ghost?

MASON.—It was.

MARTYN.—Was not the same gift given to St. Timothy and the rest of the successors of the apostles by the imposition of their hands for the work of the same ministry?

MASON.—I believe it was.

MARTYN.—Will you be so kind as to explain to me, why the Holy Ghost given to the apostles should make them infallible, and the same Holy Ghost given to their successors, by the imposition of their hands, should not make them infallible.

MASON.—I see no particular difficulty in supposing the Spirit given to one to make him infallible and to another for ordinary purposes. Indeed this is the case. The Spirit made the apostles infallible, the same Spirit is given to the children of God in general, and yet you, Sir, will not say that all the children of God are infallible.

MARTYN.—But you must observe, there is a difference in the end for which this Spirit is thus given. To Christians in general it is given merely for moral purposes, to enable them to love God and do his will; and this moral influence St. Timothy and all the apostles had, before the descent of the Holy Ghost upon them to qualify them for the work of the ministry. But it is to this last point I will confine your attention. The same Spirit which descended upon the apostles, and rendered them infallible to qualify them for the ministry, descended upon St. Timothy and his fellow-successors by the imposition of the hands of the apostles to qualify them for the same work. Now, I again ask you, why should the same Spirit, given for the same end, render one infallible and the other not so?

MASON.—I cannot give a satisfactory answer. But I do not see what necessity there was for St. Paul to exhort Timothy to stir up the grace, or to lay hands only on faithful men, if the Spirit rendered them infallible.

MARTYN.—Evidently for the same reason as St. Paul himself found it necessary to chastise his body, lest, after

having preached to others, he himself should become a castaway.

MASON.—Your argument appears a strong one.

MARTYN.—And that the successors of the apostles were infallible is also proved from other texts. St. Paul tells us, "God has given some apostles, and some prophets, and other some evangelists, and other some pastors and doctors, for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, until we all meet in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God." And Jesus Christ himself promised that this Holy Spirit should guide his apostles and their successors into all truth, and should abide with them for ever. And he himself promised to remain with them always even to the end of the world. Lastly, the Christian world in all ages is warned against false teachers, who would come in sheep's clothing, &c. Now I contend that this proves there must be in all ages a true Christian ministry attended with infallible marks by which it may be distinguished from all false, deceitful, destructive pretenders described as wolves in sheep's clothing. Nor is it sufficient to say they must be tried by the scripture, for this is the point most disputed, which class of teachers are the false ones; all pretending to teach the scriptures, and none of them willing to recognize their own body as the false teachers spoken of. However, the scripture gives us a pretty close and correct picture of them. 1. They come—are not originally sent, as the apostle says they must be. 2. They come, pretending to be Christ, *i. e.* invested with his authority, but can give no certain evidence of it. 3. They put on the skin of a sheep, *i. e.* pretending an overweening sanctity, that they may more effectually deceive. 4. They come in detached parts or sects—not like the sun, as he beautifully describes the authoritative ministry rising in the east and continuing one unbroken course, enlightening the whole world with the rays of truth, till it sets in the western horizon—so, says he, shall the coming of the Son of Man be.

MASON.—If we are provided with an infallible ministry, then we might as well throw the scriptures overboard, as of no use. But the fact of their being written by divine inspiration proves that they were designed to be our ultimate rule. I do not deny the utility of preaching; I believe it to be necessary, and of divine appointment, and that there will always be a true ministry. But I contend there is, after all, an appeal from the preacher to the Bible. To the law and to the testimony; if any man speak not according to this

word there is no light in him. As to Jesus Christ saying he would be with his apostles to the end of the world, I believe he is so with them teaching by the scriptures.

MARTYN.—An infallible authority does not make the scriptures of no use—they are of great use. They are the inspired word of God—they are precious monuments of the lives, doctrines, and miracles of Christ and his apostles. They are useful for doctrine, for reproof, for confirmation and instruction. *All I assert of them is, they are not the sole independent rule of faith; and that, as to the mere letter of scripture, they are not the rule at all; it is the *sense* and not the letter, that is our rule. And, moreover, that Jesus Christ never intended them as such. Jesus Christ wrote nothing, neither did he command his apostles to write. His command is, go and preach, and teach all nations; and you yourself have acknowledged that this was the rule during the days of the apostles, and you could not disprove that the same infallible authority descended to their successors in the ministry.

MASON.—I have done so: but I insist that the fact of the apostles being inspired by the Holy Ghost to write is equivalent to a command; and as God never commands without just cause, it must be that they might become the rule of faith to following generations. But your assertions upon this point make the scripture no rule at all.

MARTYN.—I have asserted nothing that I have not proved, or can prove. I have asserted and proved, that the command of Christ was to preach and teach—therefore, whatever the apostles preached and taught, whether written or not written, is of divine authority. And hence the apostle requires the church to observe all that he had taught, whether by *word*, he says, or by our epistle. The scriptures were written by piecemeal; some parts to one church, and other some to another; and the cause was this:—The apostles, not having the gift of ubiquity, when difficulties or errors arose in the distant churches which they had planted, they wrote to them such instructions as were necessary; others wrote the gospels for different purposes; and what was thus written, coming from the same inspired source as the unwritten word, was of equal authority with it. So far, therefore, as circumstances rendered it necessary to write, that necessity is equivalent to a command; but I deny that there was any command, or any necessity equivalent to a command, or that it ever was written as the sole independent rule of faith. As to your assertion that the promises of Christ regard the

apostles teaching by the scriptures, you have first to prove that the scriptures are as plain as the living voice of the apostles—and that no living voice is necessary to explain them—and that they contain all that the apostles taught—and that they can never be lost—which you can never do; for many books are already lost which have been written by the inspired prophets and apostles. Where, then, is the proof that Christ will be with the scriptures till the end of the world, and how do they guide men into all truth? How much plainer it is to understand these promises made to the ministry of the church in the persons of the apostles. And how much more congenial with other promises made to the visible church—that she shall be built upon a rock, and that the gates of hell shall not prevail against her?

MASON.—So then the certainty of the doctrines of the written word must depend upon the teaching authority of the Christian ministry; yea, and the very authority of the scriptures too. But St. Luke tells Theophilus he wrote his gospel to him, “that he might know the verity of those things in which he had been instructed.” Jesus Christ himself told the Jews to search the scriptures, that they might come to a knowledge of his divine character and mission. St. Paul commends the Bereans for searching the scriptures, to see whether those things were so or not. Thus overturning your assumption altogether. For if the certainty of Theophilus’s faith did not depend upon what he heard, but upon the written gospel of St. Luke—if the certainty of the character and doctrines of our Saviour himself was to be drawn from the scriptures—and if the faith of the Bereans was commended because it was founded not so much upon the declarations of even an inspired apostle, as upon the testimony of the scriptures—a *fortiori*, the scriptures are a stronger and more sufficient rule to us than the *ipse dixit* of fallible man.

MARTYN.—It is an axiom of logic, “that which proves too much, proves nothing at all.” Will you say, Mr. Mason, if the scribes and pharisees, to whom our Saviour then spoke, could not discover this testimony concerning Christ in the scripture, as most certainly many of them pretended not to do, that therefore his divine authority was not infallibly certain? Or, in other words, was not the divine mission of Christ thus certain, whether they found it there or not? Would an infallible apostle have been to be disbelieved if the Bereans, through their own blindness, had not found in the scripture that these things were so? Then what becomes of your

faith in Christ? And what becomes of your former assertion, that the apostles were infallible, and their preaching and teaching the only rule of faith during their day? As to the narrations which Theophilus had heard, they might be from unauthorized, or at least less authorized persons. And St. Luke might very properly think it necessary to give him his account as of greater verity, coming as it did from an evangelical and an eye-witness. But, after all, the certainty of the facts related, even in St. Luke's gospel, depends on his infallibility. It is evident, therefore, the scripture may be referred to as illustrative or corroborative of a doctrine or fact, and yet the certainty of its truth depend on an infallible interpreter. If you ask me why they were referred to them, if not as a rule of faith? I answer at once, as we now refer the Jews to the law and the prophets, the Mussulman to the Koran, or the Bramin to his Shaster, or as Catholics now refer Protestants to the Bible. We all know the Old Testament is not the sole independent rule of faith, and particularly not as interpreted by the Jews. We all know that the Koran or the Shaster is no rule at all, and yet, when addressing those who believe in them, we *ex professo*, refer them to their own acknowledged law. So Catholics now refer Protestants to their own rule, although we know well it is not the sole independent rule of the Christian faith and practice.

You seem to fear lest the authority of the scriptures should depend upon the authority of the church, and I unequivocally assert that it does. Protestants have only moral evidence of the scripture being the authentic work of the apostles and the inspired word of God. Now mere moral evidence can never produce infallible certainty, and yet you must have this certainty before you can make an act of divine faith upon any doctrine of the scriptures. You have received the original scripture from the Catholic Church. You are obliged to depend upon her testimony, either individually or in council, both as to the number of books, the genuineness of the copies, their authenticity and inspiration. To certain fathers we are indebted for their learned labours in examining copies, and detecting spurious and surreptitious productions, and other corruptions of heretics; and to the councils of the church we owe our knowledge and faith in the sacred canon. The 3rd council of Carthage was the first that defined the sacred canon, so as to stamp upon it the seal of undisputed authority. Now, if the Catholic Church was fallible, and might err, perhaps she erred then; and if she might then

err in council, *a fortiori*, individuals were liable to err ; and then where is your fallible certainty in the scripture ? But supposing the scripture to be the only infallible rule of faith, this would be an article of faith, and consequently found in the only sufficient rule. Now, I demand of you plain scripture for it. But you cannot produce a plain unequivocal text, declaring it to be the sole, independent, sufficient rule of faith—and if you could produce such proof, still it would be to be shown, how the scripture can bear testimony to itself, and I would drive you after all into the real vicious circle.

MASON.—There are many points in your reply which I find it difficult to answer ; I never thought of them before—but your last position I must controvert. You say the infallibility of scripture is to be known from the church. Now, if so, how are we to know the infallibility of the church herself. If the scripture cannot bear testimony to itself, and I certainly think it cannot, no more can the church ; and in this we charge you with a vicious circle.

MARTYN.—Your objection is a strong one, and one frequently urged ; but I think I shall be able to shew that the cases are not parallel. It is evident infallible certainty can never be derived from a mere fallible source, and you suppose the church to be fallible, *i. e.* liable to err, and, having erred, therefore your ground for the infallibility of the scripture is quite destroyed. But the infallibility of the church is not derived from a fallible source. It does not depend upon the scriptures, although the scriptures, when known, may be cited to corroborate it. The church derives her infallibility from the same source as Christ and his apostles, *viz.* from an infallible God. And the knowledge of this infallibility of the church is a part of the faith coming directly from God—taught by Christ and his apostles to the church, as a dogma of faith before the Christian scriptures were written ; consequently the church had the faith of her own infallibility before she could possibly have it from the scriptures, *viz.* as taught by the apostles who confirmed this doctrine, as well as every other doctrine they taught, by an appeal to miracles. Neither did this faith of the church rest merely on the teaching of the apostles, but also on the infused gift of the Holy Ghost in the hearts of the faithful. And as the church, instructed from her birth, and possessing this article of faith in common with every other from this instruction and infusion of the Spirit of God, spread throughout the earth the truths which Christ had taught—wherever the knowledge of

the gospel came, the knowledge of infallibility came with it. The church, therefore, throughout the world, was in possession of this doctrinal fact, and taught it to their successors before any appeal could be made to the Bible.

And the Catholic Church is not a different church, but the same church; a filiation of the same believing multitude and body of believing pastors throughout the world, having authority and power from their predecessors, by the imposition of their hands, to teach these truths in the church; and at the same time acknowledged by the faithful at large to be true teachers, lawfully ordained and sent to minister in this church of God. The infallibility of the church comes to us in one undeviating tide of divine faith, taught and supported by an unbroken succession of pastors from the apostles of Christ. Nor can you, Mr. Mason, point out any one period of the church in which this doctrine was not held as an article of divine faith. On the contrary, all the acts and monuments of the church confirm the fact, and all the decrees of councils have been made in the spirit of it. For the sake of, illustration, I will resemble the church to yonder oak, It is of the same nature, animated with the same living sap, and bears the same fruit as its parent stock, first planted by the divine hand. The principles of which its substance is compounded, are independent of itself in this sense, that they come from the creative hand of God. But they are co-existent with it, and indeed form its identity, and will continue so to do till the final end of all things—so it is with the church of God. The faith of the church, of which infallibility is an integral part, comes from God, taught by Christ and his apostles, infused ever into the hearts of the faithful by the Holy Spirit, and as such is independent of the church in its source, but at the same time forms her identity. It is indeed the living sap in this tree of life flowing through all its filiations, and producing the same leaves and flowers and fruits with the parent stock, for the support and healing of all nations. Moreover, this church of Christ has received the scriptures from the apostles, and; as she has received them, she can in her personal capacity infallibly pronounce upon them as to their authenticity and divine inspiration: and, as possessing the deposit of faith and the Spirit of Truth, she can infallibly decide upon their meaning. Now the scriptures being received from an infallible source, we have infallible certainty of their divine authority—and now also their testimony corroborates the testimony of the faith as to the infallibility of the church, and of every doctrine she teaches.

MASON.—I must say your argument appears unanswerable; I never heard these things treated in this manner before—I shall ponder them more at leisure.

MARTYN.—I have now proved that the rule of faith was the teaching authority of the church; that this alone was coeval with revelation; that the scriptures did not set aside that authority, nor are they, for this reason, the sole independent rule of faith. I will now proceed to another natural argument. The rule of faith appointed by Christ to guide mankind into all truth must evidently be universal in matters of faith *i. e.* it must contain all that Christ taught—it must contain it in such a manner that all men may come to the same conclusion as to every article of what Christ taught, or it is no longer a certain and sufficient rule of faith. Now it is easy to shew that the teaching authority of the church is this rule. “Teach all things,” says Christ whatsoever I have taught you.” Here then Christ taught them all things, and they were to teach all things to others, and to enable them so to do—“The Spirit would bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever he had taught them.” But the scriptures do not contain all things. In the first place, many books are lost, and we have no security that these lost books did not contain many points which the scriptures do not now plainly enjoin. Secondly we are told that Jesus Christ spent forty days with his disciples after his resurrection, instructing them in the things regarding his kingdom, and yet we are nowhere told what these things were. Thirdly, St. John tells us, if all the things which Jesus did and taught were written, the world would not contain the books; here is a positive declaration that all things were not written. We have positive evidence, therefore, that all things were taught to the apostles, but all things were not written. Again, Protestants themselves believe many things which are nowhere plainly revealed in the Bible, which they ought to be to form a complete rule of faith. For example; you believe the Christian Sunday is divinely appointed—now I ask you to shew me when, and where, and by whom—and I defy you to bring a single passage in proof of this point that I cannot prove may be easily explained another way, and that I cannot meet with many more passages much more explicit for the Jewish Sabbath. You believe that infants ought to be baptized—I demand a plain scripture command for it; I defy you to produce any proof which I cannot overturn, and produce strong arguments to the contrary, as indeed the Anabaptists do. Most Protestants believe that divine and apos-

tolical command to abstain from blood and from things strangled is annulled, so that Christians can lawfully eat these things; I demand proof from scripture. I might propose many other points, such as sprinkling and the sign of the cross in baptism; whether it be lawful for Christians to swear in any case; whether they may go to law; whether if a man robs me of my cloak, I am bound to give him my coat also. In none of these points, and a hundred more, do you make the scripture your sole independent rule of faith. I will here repeat what I have propounded before: if the scripture be the sole independent rule, then this proposition is an article of faith, and the most important one—because this point must be settled before a man can know what he is called to believe, and what not, and this definite proposition must be plainly declared in the scriptures, and I demand where this proposition is plainly asserted? I do not ask you to prove the truth of the scriptures, for this I believe as much as you; neither will I permit you to fly off into a moral argument upon the point, for that moment you abandon your rule—scripture, and scripture alone, is your rule, and I demand scripture. I will carry the point farther. You must own the English Bible to be your sole independent rule of faith, at least for all who can read—no other. Now I ask you, where you are told this in scripture, and how you know from scripture that the English gospel of St. Matthew is infallibly a true copy of the original written in Hebrew, and lost many hundred years ago? And how are you infallibly certain from the scripture that your translation is a faithful translation of the other originals, which have also been lost many years ago? Now I positively declare, without fear of confusion, that the scripture is not universal in all necessary matters of faith and practice.

MASON.—I acknowledge that it is nowhere specified what the things were which Christ taught his apostles after his resurrection; and I know also that St. John says, “if every thing was written, the world would not contain the books.” But I assert that all things necessary to salvation were written; and I assert also that the latter text makes as much against you as against us—for you cannot prove that you teach all that which would more than fill the world with books.

MARTYN.—I have proved that Christ taught his apostles all things which he was sent to reveal, and commanded them to teach all things, and that the rule of faith appointed by Christ must continue to teach all things. I have brought a variety of texts, and produced a variety of instances, to

prove that you have no certainty that the scripture does contain all things necessary to salvation, and that it nowhere says so—you have not disproved the evidence I have brought; and as to your assertion, that all things necessary to salvation were written, proves nothing, for assertion is no proof.

MASON.—St. Paul says, “the holy scripture is able to make us wise unto salvation.” And if wise to salvation, what more can be wanting?

MARTYN.—I have shewn that this was said of the old testament—and will you say the new testament was not necessary? It is evident any one book of holy scripture is able to impart wisdom conducting to salvation. For example; the prophecy of Isaias, which so plainly points out the person, character, and office of Christ. But will you say that the prophecy of Isaias is the sole independent and sufficient rule of faith and practice? Besides, St. Paul told St. Timothy, “that the old testament was able to make him wise to salvation, through the faith which is in Christ Jesus;” so that it was in connexion with the Christian faith, which his son Timothy had learnt from him by word of mouth, that the old testament scripture was able to make him wise to salvation.

MASON.—At all events St. Timothy had read the scriptures from a child; but you prohibit the reading of the scriptures, and therefore you are opposed to St. Paul, consequently are not infallible.

MARTYN.—This point is entirely beside the question. We will consider this point a little later; at present the question is, whether or not the scripture is the sole independent rule of faith and practice.

MASON.—The apostle says, “all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness;” therefore it is sufficient.

MARTYN.—What a conclusion! Every verse and chapter is profitable, therefore it is sufficient. Do you like the conclusion, Mr. Mason? But here is another point to which I will call your attention. Your scripture says, “all scripture is given by the inspiration of God.” Now I deny that your translation is correct. The proper reading is, “all scripture divinely inspired is profitable.” Both the Greek and Latin texts shew that this is the true reading, and common sense confirms it. There have been, in various ages, false scriptures produced, and it is a question now between

you and me, whether the book of Tobias be true scripture or false scripture. Besides this, the original word scripture means any writing, good or bad, true or false, sacred or profane; and hence the necessary use of the qualifying adjective, holy or sacred scripture, when speaking of the divinely inspired writings. But your Bible tells a palpable falsehood, for it says, "all scripture, *i. e.* every writing, is divinely inspired." This shows you how little calculated your English Bible is to be a sole independent sufficient rule of faith and practice.

MASON.—The Bible is a perfect rule of faith, or it is not. If not, it is an imperfect rule—therefore not God's holy word. If it be a perfect rule, what need of any other?

MARTYN.—I cannot help perceiving that your foundation is shaken, or you would not leave so many of my remarks unanswered, nor would you have recourse to such weak arguments. I do not say this to wound your feelings, but because I rejoice at the triumph of truth. But to the point—your dilemma may be answered another way. Instead of the Bible, put the old testament, and then see how conclusive the argument appears. The old testament is a perfect rule of faith, or it is not. If not, it is not God's holy word—If it be, what need we of the new testament. In other words, you might as well say, because a part is not the whole, a part is not a part.

MASON.—Sir, you do not wound my feelings. I candidly acknowledge there is much that I cannot answer. I must again say, I never heard these things treated of so before, and I am not prepared to answer. But you must not conclude that I am convinced. These things will be matter for more deliberate consideration. However, I will ask you this question: If God cannot speak so plain in the scripture as to be understood without an interpreter, how can man pretend to do it?

MARTYN.—You might as well ask, why men cannot speak as plain without a voice as with it? A living voice is always plainer to be understood than a silent book. If we mistake the living voice once, we can ask again; but if we mistake the sense of a book, it always presents the same silent letters to our view, and leaves us as much in the dark as ever, unless there be an authorized interpreter.

MASON.—The scriptures sufficiently interpret themselves; one part that is obscure by another that is more plain.

MARTYN.—And yet they cannot settle disputes. Here are two texts: "my Father is greater than I." "I and my

Father are one." The Unitarian takes one, the Trinitarian the other. The former denies the divinity of Christ, the latter asserts it. Each produce their texts, and both explain them in a different sense. The Trinitarian, that he is one in nature with the Godhead; the Unitarian, that he is one only in office or agency. Both texts stand indelibly on the sacred page, and both opponents stand staring and bickering at each other without an umpire.

MASON.—I do not rest my cause against the Unitarian on one isolated text, but on many texts joined with many strong demonstrative reasons; and I prove to him the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity, and if he will not hear me, I turn from him and leave him in his infidelity, as St. Paul turned from the Jews.

MARTYN.—This is all very pretty—but the Unitarian laughs at your pretended infallibility—produces his numerous texts and reasons in return, and justly repays you in your own coin, by turning his back upon you and your idolatry.

MASON.—O, Sir, I beg you will not misunderstand me; I do not pretend to be infallible.

MARTYN.—Then you may be in error, and the Unitarian right; and what presumption it is for one fallible mortal to turn his back upon another, and condemn him as unworthy of eternal life, because he refuses his fallible dictation. There is no parity, Sir, between you and St. Paul—he could justly turn from the Jews as unworthy of eternal life because he was infallible—but you tell the Unitarian, I may lead you into error, and yet condemn him because he will not follow you. Surely he might as well err in following himself as err in following you. But as you have asked me several questions, permit me to ask you one. If the scriptures explain themselves, what need is there of any other interpreter—what need of preachers at all?

MASON.—For those who cannot read.

MARTYN.—Then preaching is the rule for those who cannot read? Now you have asserted that the scriptures are the sole independent sufficient rule. But I return to the charge—of what use are preachers to those who cannot read, if they are liable to lead the people astray? Would it not evidently have been wiser in our Saviour to have commanded his apostles to write the whole gospel in the plainest manner, and to go through the earth teaching all people to read?

MASON.—You certainly appear to have reason on your side; I own I cannot answer you.

MARTYN.—I have fully shewn that the scriptures are not

universal in matter, *i. e.* they do not contain all things necessary to be believed, nor is there any certainty in private interpretation. I have also hinted that they were not universal in time and place, nor in regard to the greater part of mankind. And this you yourself acknowledged, when you said the teaching authority of the apostles was the rule of faith to the first Christians, and that preaching is now the rule to those who cannot read. However, I will establish the truth of this proposition by clear facts.

It was about the year of our Lord 41, that is, eight years after his ascension, before St. Matthew wrote his gospel. It was in 61 before that of St. Mark was written—that of St. Luke in 63. St. John wrote his gospel towards the end of his life, according to some authors, about the year 104. The acts of the apostles were written in 63 or 64. The epistles were written in the following order:—

- 1 Epis. Thessalonians, about the year 52.
- 2 Epis. ditto in the same year.
Epis. Galatians, about the year 55.
- 1 Epis. Corinthians, year 57.
- 2 Epis. ditto, same year.
Epis. Romans, year 58.
Epis. Phillippians, 62.
Epis. Philemon, same year.
Epis. Colossians, same year.
Epis. Ephesians, same year.
Epis. Hebrews, same year.
- 1 Epis. Timothy, year 64.
Epis. Titus, same year.
- 2 Epis. Timothy, year 65.
Epis. St. James, year 60.
- 1 Epis. St. Peter, about the same year.
- 2 Epis. St. Peter, probably about the same year.

The epistles of St. John were written a little before the destruction of Jerusalem, and the Revelations in the year 96. Consequently all this time the new testament could not be a rule of faith. Then these writings were not collated, authenticated, and formed into a canon, and pronounced to be the inspired word of God before the third council of Carthage, in the year 397. The same canon was confirmed by Pope Innocent the first, who lived in the year 402—Pope Gelasius, who lived in the year 492, or 494, in a council of 70 bishops at Rome, confirmed the same canon. It was again confirmed by the sixth general council in the year 680. It is again named by the council of Florence in the year 1438—to the acts of which council the Grecians, Arminians, and

Jacobites subscribed. I make these remarks to shew that the world did not know the true canon of scripture before the year 397. Although several doctors of the Church had delivered their private opinions on the documents in question, and the Church made use of them in her service, yet several books of the New Testament were doubted of till defined by the unanimous voice of the council, both in the east and the west, in these her repeated decrees. The scriptures therefore could not be the rule of faith before they were known, and, when known, they never were considered by the Christian world as the sole independent sufficient rule of faith and practice.

You must also remember, that when the canon was defined it existed in manuscript, and could not be printed before that art was invented, which was by one Faust, at Strasburg, in the year 1440; so that down to the year 1440 it could be in the hands of but few besides the clergy, and each copy written with a pen by those despised persons, the monks of former times. And, when printed, very few could read, not, indeed, as has been said, on account of the restraints of the Church, but from physical impossibility. And now let us come down to our own times—how few now can read; and of those who can, not one in a thousand make it their sole rule of faith. Almost all men follow some favourite preacher or sect, under whose influence they have been educated, or under whose banner they have ranked themselves. You have acknowledged that they are not a rule to those who are ignorant of letters—and experience teaches that they are not the sole rule to the great mass of mankind. There must always be a guide in religion, and if that guide be liable to err, then they that follow it must err likewise. And all error must necessarily be venial where there is no certain rule. God cannot punish me for erring where he has not given me an infallible guide.

MASON.—All I can say to this is, God preserved the teaching authority of his Church free from error till the scriptures were known, and now he preserves the scriptures as the standard of truth to his Church, and all who use the following means will be guided to the true meaning of them, and these persons thus guided are the rule for those who cannot read. 1. Attention. 2. Diligence in searching the scriptures. 3. Collation of passages, 4. Observance of the connexions. 5. Sincerity and impartiality. 6. Prayer and devotion for assistance in the work. "Let him that lacketh wisdom ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally."

MARTYN.—I am afraid you have forgotten your former

assertions, denials, and acknowledgments. First, you have asserted that teaching authority of the apostles was the sole rule of faith to the Church during their day. But you denied at that time that this rule continued after their time, because infallibility did not descend to their successors; but you now carry this infallible authority down to the year 397 at least; and it is with good reason you have extended the period of infallibility, or you would have no grounds for knowing what the Bible is and what it is not; much less of knowing its infallible dictates. For this council either was infallible, or it was not. If it was, then your former assertion is false—then the rule appointed by Christ continued in the successors of the apostles down to this time. If it was not infallible, then it might err in defining the books of scripture, and may have given us books not divinely inspired, and kept back some that were. Then as to your assertion, that from this time the rule was changed, I demand proof. And as to the capability of those who can read, and who, you suppose, are a rule for those who cannot, much is to be said. First, I demand proof that God has appointed one rule for those who can read, and another for those who cannot. Secondly, were I to grant that the Bible is the rule for those who read it with the six qualifications you specify, I ask you will it lead them all to the same conclusions? Does it do so? You know it does not. Surely you will not charge the learned and conscientious Unitarian with not reading with attention and diligence, or not collating passages, nor observing connexions, or with want of sincerity and neglect of prayer? You will not be so uncharitable as to charge the pious Calvinist, or devout Quaker, with such neglect? And yet you condemn the former as guilty of blasphemy in denying the Trinity, the Godhead of Jesus Christ, and refusing him divine worship. You condemn the second for extolling the divine attribute of foreknowledge; the sovereign power to efficacious grace; and denying your doctrine of free will and equality of election in Christ. And you condemn the latter for their rejection of the Christian ministry and the sacraments, which you believe Christ ordained in his Church; nor can you call these things nonessentials, for they evidently involve the foundations of religion and the dearest interests of men.

MASON.—They are not nonessentials; and I must condemn them, and tell them they err, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God; and I am sure the scriptures are evidently against them.

MARTYN.—So think you. But they read the scripture as much as you—they are equally interested in finding out the truth as you—they are as learned as you, and make use of the six qualifications as much as you—and yet they come to opposite conclusions. And why should you be right, and all the rest of the world wrong?

MASON.—I must confess I conversed with a Unitarian gentleman some time ago, and he pretended to make use of these means, and told me he became a Unitarian by these means. But I can give you a reason why a Methodist should be right, and all the rest wrong. The Methodist teaches the direct witness of the Spirit of God bearing witness with our spirits that we are the children of God; and St. John tells such, “You have an unction from the Holy One and you know all things. Now, no one of these sects teach the doctrine of the Spirit so powerfully as the Methodists, and consequently they have not so much of the unction from the Holy One, nor do they know all things.

MARTYN.—The mere fact of the Methodists teaching a doctrine does not prove it to be true. In the second place, you say they do not teach this doctrine so fully and enjoy it so fully as the Methodists. You, no doubt, know their doctrines better than I, and you conclude that because they do not teach it so fully, they do not enjoy it so fully. But do not the Quakers and Calvinists, too, pretend to the Spirit, and may not a person feel more than he can express? However, it is not my business to defend them—you believe they teach and enjoy it to a certain degree. I will now ask you two questions. Are they the children of God?

MASON.—(*with some hesitation*).—I dare not say they are not. I believe many of them are good people.

MARTYN.—Well; if good people, they are the children of God, therefore they must have the Spirit of God; for it is written, “because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba—Father.” Now why the Spirit of God cannot or does not teach them as fully by its unction, and give them as fully to enjoy its influence as a Methodist, I cannot understand.

MASON.—What I meant to say was, that they are not so fully the children of God, nor do they possess so much of the plenitude of the Spirit as the Methodists.

MARTYN.—So fully and so much; really, Mr. Mason, I cannot understand you. Do you mean to say, a man may be partly a child of God and partly a child of the devil?

MASON.—I did not say so. I believe there are only two

classes and two places. I hold no purgatory; still I think one child of God more in favour than another; and, if so, may know more and experience more of the Spirit than another.

MARTYN.—Were I discussing purgatory I would seize your last admission, and, notwithstanding your dislike of purgatory, you would get a singe. But the question is not whether one person may live up to his faith more than another, or attain a higher degree of holiness than his neighbour; but the question is, whether he can be a child of God, and not have the Spirit of God.

MASON.—He cannot be a child of God without the Spirit of God; for it is written, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

MARTYN.—Can this Spirit teach a Calvinist or Quaker one doctrine by its unction, and a Methodist another by the same unction?

MASON.—It cannot.

MARTYN.—Will you be so kind as to explain to me, how a Calvinist or Quaker can have the Spirit of God and its teaching unction, and yet err, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God?

MASON (*stirring up a cup of tea which had just been brought*).—Excuse me, Sir, I feel rather confused.

MARTYN—(*with a good natured laugh upon his countenance*).—Ah! my friend, if you are confused, it is one of those rare circumstances in which confusion arises from clearness of perception. You see plainly that the Spirit, as well as the word of God, cannot teach contradiction, and yet contradictions abound among those who profess to have the Spirit and the unction, teaching all things. The other question I was about to propose, but which is in part rendered unnecessary by your confusion, was this—do the Methodist preachers believe themselves infallible by the unction of the Spirit?

MASON.—I have already disclaimed infallibility for myself, and so do all the rest. We know that we may err.

MARTYN.—If you all may err, how can you lift up yourselves above all others, and say you have the direct witness of the Spirit and its unction, teaching all things. If you *may* err, perhaps you *do* err—perhaps the Calvinist or Quaker understands the scripture better than you; but they also tell us they may err, and you say they do err. Who, then, are the true interpreters of the scripture? Where is the true Church of God? You all condemn each other of error, and of error in essentials. Where, then, am I to look for truth?

I say again, every man may as well err in following his own lights, as err in following a guide who tells him, *ex cathedra*, I may lead you astray. Where, then, is that rule of faith appointed by Christ, possessing all truths, and teaching them to all nations in all ages? That such a rule must exist with every generation of men is plain, and that it must be adapted to every age, every clime, every language, every order, capacity or condition of mankind, is equally plain. Such a rule cannot depend upon the casualties of translators, transcribers, printing presses, and compositors. Nor can it be subject to the errors of private judgment, either of the proudly learned, or the ignorant and illiterate. This leads me to another point, on which I shall be short. If the scriptures are not the only sufficient rule of faith—if they were not coeval with the gospel law—if they do not and cannot declare themselves to have superseded the authority of the Christian Church and ministry—if no other competent authority has declared so—if they do not contain all revealed truths—if they have not existed in all ages, teaching all nations—if, in fine, they, as interpreted by private judgment or the pretended unction of the Spirit, cannot lead to unity of faith, but to contradiction and error, and that in the very essentials of religion—why then, the original rule which you have admitted was established by Christ still exists, and is invested with authority to watch over the deposit of faith, and teach it to all generations; and this authority must be inherent or infallible. It is an indubitable fact, that there can be no definite rule of divine faith and authority for teaching it, without this provision on the part of Almighty God. For if the only rule I have in religion may lead me astray, it ceases to be a divine rule, and that moment the end of revelation is frustrated, and my responsibility ceases. Let me not be told I am arguing *à priori*, and laying down rules for the Deity as the Jews and Greeks. They dictated to the Deity the manner of his revelation, I only form rational and scriptural conclusions from his prior commands. When my God tells me, if you believe not you shall be condemned, I have a right to conclude that he has made it possible for me to know infallibly what I am bound to believe under pain of condemnation. And this, bye the bye, is one of your first concessions, Mr. Mason; for your words are—the wisdom of God would never have revealed his truth without designing to perpetuate it, and would never have commanded all to believe it without giving them the means of knowing it, and distinguishing from error.

MASON.—I remember, when speaking of the apostles giving the Holy Ghost, by imposition of hands, to their successors for the work of the ministry, you insisted that infallibility was communicated by it. Did you mean to say at that time that infallibility is in like manner given to every priest thus ordained?

MARTYN.—Abstracting from the extraordinary powers necessary to the infant Church, and as far as he is equally disposed in mind for the reception of those spiritual gifts necessary for the ordinary exercise of his functions, I do. In other words, no priest can ever err in faith as long as he is guided by the Church possessing the Holy Spirit, and follows the influence of the same Spirit given to him for the work of the ministry in his ordination. He may fall as Judas fell, as Peter fell, as Damas fell; but such fall is not to be attributed to the Church, but to himself. Moreover, the promise of the Holy Spirit to the Church is both conditional and unconditional. It is conditional to individuals, viz. depending on their dispositions and exertions. But to the Church collectively, as to the body and spouse of Christ, it is unconditional and preventive. The individual is preserved in the possession and dictation of truth by his union with the Church, and fidelity to those duties which the Church requires. But the Church, collectively, is preserved in the possession and dictation of truth, by her indissoluble union with Christ, the Head and Spouse, and by the unconditional promise of the Holy Ghost, to guide her unto all truth even to the end of the world.

MASON.—Could Timothy fail of his infallibility?

MARTYN.—He could; and hence he was required to stir up the grace that was in him; so could even St. Paul, or any other individual apostle. Hence, he says, he chastised his body, and brought it under subjection, lest, after having preached to others, he might become a cast-away; so may other individuals. The promise is unconditional, and preventive to the body of the Church alone, as the rule of faith and guide of souls in the way of salvation.

MASON.—If each individual is fallible in his own private capacity, how can an aggregate of fallibles make up an infallible?

MARTYN.—You lose sight of the principle of infallibility. You suppose it to consist of the personal properties of the men; whereas it arises from the Holy Spirit dwelling in the Church, animating the Church, and superintending, by its overruling influence, the councils of the Church, when con-

gregated lawfully, deliberating freely, and deciding solemnly, upon points that affect the purity of the faith, and the vital interests of the Church. You suppose the Holy Spirit guided the apostles and prophets and other sacred writers, in delivering the written word. Why should you think it impossible for the same Spirit to guide the body of the Church into all truth?

MASON.—I never saw things in this light before.

MARTYN.—I believe not; and I pray God to increase your light. And in looking at the subject in this light, you will find a key to the passage which puzzled you just now. The Church has the “unction from the Holy One, and she knows all things.” You will also see that this was a covenant mercy made with the Church before her establishment. “This is my covenant with them,” saith the Lord, “my Spirit which is in thee, and my words which I have put into thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth, and for ever.”

MASON.—I have always believed these passages to be true of the invisible Church of God, *i. e.* of those regenerated and born again of the Spirit of God; and I do believe that the Church in this sense can never fail; and we have reason to believe, that this is the nature of the Church of God, “The kingdom of God is within you. The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.”

MARTYN.—There is no such thing as an invisible church in your church. The soul of religion is interior we know; but can a man have the kingdom of God in his heart, and not manifest it outwardly? Certainly not. Where there is internal faith, there will be external acts of it. Where there is internal charity, there will be external devotion, and obedience as to the appointed means of grace. In a word, there will be a people professing a pure faith, possessing a true worship, a true ministry, and true sacraments. Much has been said about an invisible church during the reign of the Catholic religion. But this invisible Church, either conformed to the supposed idolatry of the Catholic worship, or it did not. If it did, then the people of this pure Church bowed their knee at the shrine of Baal, and exteriorly conformed to the worship of the idols set before them. And if so, they cannot be compared to the thousands of Israel in the days of Elias, or to the three Hebrews in the furnace of fire. If they did not, then they become a visible Church; and can be pointed out during the whole 800 years and more,

when it is declared idolatry covered the face of Christendom. The fact is, all the promises of Christ are made to a visible church, and a visible church alone can answer the ends of the gospel. "The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains and all nations shall flow unto it."—"Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."—"The church of God is the pillar and ground of truth."—"Ye are the salt of the earth."—"Ye are as a city on a hill that cannot be hid."—"Tell it to the church. If any man will not hear the church, let him be as the heathen and the publican." Now all these things are said of the church not of the scriptures. If any one is to teach, it is the church. If any one is to be heard, it is the church. If any thing is to be permanent, it is the church. And if any security from error is promised to any gnide, it is to the church.

MASON.—I do not see what necessity there is for the Christian church to be infallible more than the Patriarchal or Jewish churches; and I, least of all, see that this infallibility is possessed by the Catholic church. We know the Patriarchal church erred, the Jewish church erred, and we know the Catholic church erred.

MARTYN.—You surprise me. You have declared that the wisdom of God would never have revealed his truth, without designing to perpetuate it: and would never have commanded all to believe it, without giving them the means of knowing it, and distinguishing it from error. Now what is this but infallible knowledge; and yet you give up all claim to it among Protestants, and now see no necessity for it to Christians at all. But I will answer your objection. As to the patriarchs, they can scarcely be called a church, because they were under no special covenant before the calling of Abraham; but were left to the light of nature principally. That they erred, is nothing to the point therefore. However, God even then always preserved a holy seed, and preserved it in a very prominent manner. The Jews were indeed a church, and this was established for the preservation of the law of Moses, and the accomplishment of the grand economy of man's redemption in the person of the Messiah; and it infallibly answered all these purposes, till the Messiah was about to make his appearance. But the promise of that general and perpetual infallibility was not made to the Jewish church; at best it was only temporary; a shadow of good things to come; and therefore all the promises and the substance of the covenant re-

graded the Christian church. Nevertheless, as the Jewish church had an authority, that authority was to be obeyed, and several punishments were awarded to those who disobeyed; and that authority never was extinct till the end of the dispensation. Nor did Almighty God ever cease infallibly to direct it, as far the grand object of its establishment was concerned. But the Christian church stands upon a stronger foundation, and is secured by more ample promises. He never said, "I will build the Jewish church upon a rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." He never said, "I will give to the Jewish priesthood my Spirit, and he shall guide them into all truth, and shall remain with them always, even to the end of the world." But he has confirmed these promises to the Christian church. Indeed, whenever the prophets speak of the infallible character of the church, they always point to the gospel church; which contrast of itself proves that the same kind of infallibility never was designed to the character of the Jewish church, and they knew it. As to your assertion that the Catholic church has erred, I demand proof.

MASON.—Why, Sir, she is known to have added to the word of God, and has obtruded upon the world her vain and foolish fopperies, for what she is pleased to call divine and ecclesiastical traditions.

MARTYN.—As she is known to have done so, these additions and impositions can be pointed out to me. You can tell me the time when, the manner how, the people who first embraced them, the troubles they occasioned in the church, what controversies were carried on, and by whom; and how at last they prevailed so universally, that, for "800 years and more, the whole world became drowned in damnable idolatry and superstition." Now, Mr. Mason, I bind myself, if you can make good your ground, or if I should fail in proving to you that there is no article of Catholic faith now taught by the church, which article has not been taught in every age, from the apostles' time down to our day, I will immediately renounce my religion.

MASON.—You surprise me! Why the doctrine of the Real Presence was never known in the world before the days of Berengarius.

MARTYN.—Can you prove that? I can prove the contrary by a host of witnesses.

MASON.—It is now too late, and the subject too extensive. I must defer it another opportunity.

Thus ended our first interview, and we parted good friends.

On my way home, I could not resist the force of many arguments which had been produced: and I was much pleased with the Christian spirit and gentlemanly deportment of my reverend antagonist. I had thought a Popish priest a compound of three parts—part a man, part a beast, and part a devil. A man in nature, a beast in stupidity and tame servitude, and a devil in cruelty and wickedness of disposition. But I found a man indeed in nature, a gentleman in manners, a scholar in refined knowledge, and a Christian in spiritual wisdom, temper, and disposition of mind.

If, however, I was impressed with Mr. Martyn's superior character, and that my cause was not so strong as I had at first imagined, I durst by no means doubt of my religion, nor did I entertain an affection for his. I was willing to think Mr. Martyn a singular instance, and entertained a suspicion that his talents were capable of making a bad cause appear a good one. He had surprised and confounded me, but had not convinced or converted me. To deny the witness of the spirit of my conscience I thought would be blasphemy, and to doubt of my justification would be the shortest and surest way to lose it. And to this point I clung to the very last moment.

This will not appear strange to any one who knows the influence which the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and the direct witness of the Spirit, has upon the mind of a Methodist. It is the greatest bar to the conversion of a Methodist, and the strongest hold which the enemy of truth has in the hearts of this people. If they are justified as Methodists, this settles the point at once; and they have acquired this state by a simple act of faith, that they are justified through the redemption which is in Christ; and as they have acquired it by this simple act, they hold it by the same tenure. To doubt, therefore, is to lose the hold, and to offend the Spirit by whose direct witness they know that they are born of God. And yet the fact of many professing to be justified, and to have this direct witness, whose moral conduct is a disgrace to the Christian character, ought to convince them that such feelings of the mind are desultory; that the fancies of the head are too often substituted for the religion of the heart; and the reasonable hope, joined with godly fear, which ought ever to animate the breast of the true Christian, is abandoned for the phantom of imaginary inspiration, and the reveries of the wildest enthusiasm.

Notwithstanding the prejudices of education and the in-

fluence of my religious principles, I could not but discover that there was an importance about the subjects discussed, and a reasonableness in Mr. Martyn's answers, which deserved my serious attention. And I resolved to pursue the subjects till I could find some reasonable ground of faith, some solid rock on which I could cast the anchor of my hope, and build the fabric of religious verity with certainty and durability.

For this purpose I invited Mr. Martyn to my own house, determined to trace the track of truth, in all its bearings, with candour and honesty; to yield no principle till its falsehood had been fully proved, and admit no evidence that was not demonstratively true. What can I lose by looking truth in the face, and bringing my religion to her decision? said I to myself. I am either right or wrong. If right, my foundation will bear examination. If wrong, the sooner I am convinced of it the better.

My reverend friend visited me at the appointed time, and would it not swell my book beyond due limits, I would present the reader with our second discussion. However, I will give the opening speech.

"I have been thinking (said Mr. Martyn) since our last conference, in what difficult circumstances a sensible and upright heathen would be placed, were he to come to this country in quest of the true Christian religion. He would naturally wish to visit as many places of worship as he could. The first thing that would strike him would be the different forms of worship, and different systems of religious faith; and he would inquire into the cause. Reason would teach him that if the Christian religion were of God, and this God was one and unchangeable, this religion ought to dictate some degree of uniformity of worship; and that its doctrines, in particular, must be uniformly the same. He would therefore be astounded, and inquire which of these systems were right? By some he would be told, 'they are all right.' 'That is impossible,' he would rejoin; 'for one preacher said, Christ was God—another, that he was not God.' One told us he died for all men—another, that he died only for an elect number. Now these are contradictory propositions, which an infinitely true Being can never sanction."

"By others he would be referred to a book called the Bible, and told that he must find out the true church and true doctrine by this book. Perhaps he cannot read it, or if he can, he will say with the Ethiopian eunuch, 'How can I understand unless some one teach me? How can I hope to find

that which these learned teachers cannot find? Each of these says he has the true church and true doctrine, and yet all contradict each other.' Besides, he is stopped at the very threshold of his inquiry, how do I know this book to be divine? 'These men cannot agree about its sense, and if they do not know its meaning, what certainty have I that they know its origin? Was it written by Christ, he asks; they answer, No. Did he command it to be written? He gave no special command. Who did write it? The apostles of Christ the New Testament. How do you know it is the inspired word of God? From its internal evidence. Nay, if I must judge from the contradictory doctrines taught from it, it is full of contradiction, and contradiction you call falsehood. How do you know this book was written by the apostles? We have received it as such from the church which Christ established. What church was this—for I see a multitude of different churches? It was the Catholic church. Are you the Catholic church? We are a reformed part of the Catholic church, and called Protestants. A reformed part of a church which is not reformed; this appears rather strange—I should think that by reforming yourselves you either become the whole church or no church at all; for reformation and corruption, in my humble opinion, can never form one true church of Jesus Christ, who you say, is your God. But if you have reformed yourselves, how is it that so many differ from you? They have reformed themselves still more. O! then you are all reformers, one from another! Pray can you tell me infallibly which is the true church and true doctrine? Because if I must be a Christian, I must know without fear or danger of error, which of all these contradictory systems is the truth. We can give you no such security. Then I may as well remain as I am; I can but be in error, and the errors of a heathen, as you call me, may be as innocent as those of a Christian. But pray tell me where is the unreformed church? For I will not give up the pursuit till I have traced Christianity to its foundation. I suppose you will find the priest at the Catholic chapel. O! why that is the very name of the people of whom you say you have received your bible. We do acknowledge that the bible has descended to us through that church. Well, then, I must not give up the cause till I hear what they can say for themselves. So bidding the Protestant farewell, he turns his step towards the house of the Catholic clergyman, exclaiming within himself, what a strange people these Christians are. They say their God has descended from heaven

to reveal a religion, and yet none of them know for certain what it is. Either their God has acted unwisely, or this people have forsaken the truth."

"Thus pondering in his heart, he arrives at the abode of the priest of the Catholic church, and, happily finding him at home, explains to him the object of his visit. Here his wanderings terminate—his inquiries are answered—his doubts are solved—and the whole economy of God manifested to his astonished mind. Here he learns that Jesus Christ is God indeed, the second person of the Blessed Trinity. That he descended from heaven, became incarnate in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, and was made man. That he was promised of old to the patriarchs; typified in the Mosaic law; foretold by the prophets; and, in the fulness of time, manifested in the flesh. That the object of his coming was to redeem mankind from the curse entailed on sin, to repair the ruins of the fall, and to reveal the law of God to the whole world. That when he had accomplished these purposes, he again ascended to his Father. But he established a church, and a ministry in this church, and gave them a commission to teach this gospel to all nations, with the promise of salvation to those who believed, and a threatening of condemnation to those who would not. He finds that the first apostles did indeed write the New Testament, and that it contains a principal part of the faith of Christians, and, when taken in connexion with the teaching authority, the church, forms a total rule of faith. But the church was appointed the infallible interpreter of these books, for Jesus Christ had promised that the Holy Spirit, which he sent down upon the ministers of his church at the beginning, should guide them unto all truth, and remain with them for ever. He finds that this church is distinguished from all others by these four marks. She is one in faith; holy in her doctrine, institutions, and requirements; Catholic or universal, teaching all truths, to all nations, in all ages; and that her ministry is not assumed and unauthorized, but that it is apostolical, both in order and mission. Lastly, he finds that all the promises of Christ were made to this church, and that she gives infallible certainty in matters of faith and practice. This is the very thing he wanted. This reason told him must be the case. This the gospel has provided, and nothing remains but to submit himself to the divine authority of the church of God."

I leave it to my readers to form their own judgment upon this chain of argumentation; I candidly confess, to me it

appears excellent, and had I not had a number of objections upon my mind, which bubbled like the buoys on the shallows of the troubled main, the voice of reason and conscience would have told me on the spot, this reasoning is unanswerable. However, it had the effect of introducing the infallibility of the Catholic church, and, in opposition to this doctrine, I brought forward the contentions of religious orders, which at that time I took for different sects professing different systems of faith, but which I found were only orders in the same church, following the rule of their respective founders for acquiring greater perfection, but all professing the same faith, and obeying the same general authority of the church. I brought forward scholastic questions which had been warmly disputed. Here I learnt that Catholics are as free to dispute, where the essence of divine faith, or the unity of the church, is not the point in question, as any Protestant. I urged the opposition of councils. Here I was answered that councils had been held by schismatics and heretics, and these councils had passed decrees in opposition to the church; but for this the church was not responsible. The church might herself decree in matters of mere discipline at one time, and see good to decree the contrary at another time, as the master of a great household may have just reasons to forbid that to be done in the afternoon which he had commanded in the morning. But I was defied to produce two councils of the church opposing each other in matters of faith. I produced many things which I called novelties in faith, particularly those of purgatory, images, invocation of saints, sacrifice of the Mass; all which I had sworn a few years before was damnable idolatry, and I *bona fide* contended they were so. This variety of subjects regarding faith, and others regarding the discipline of the Catholic church, such as the tyranny of the priests, ignorance of the people, taking away the key of knowledge and of the word of life, inquisitions, murders, and the like, formed a series of disputation which lasted from Whit-Tuesday, 1818, till the 19th of March, 1819, sometimes by personal interviews and at other times by letter. I sought the aid of Tillotson, Jewel, Stillingfleet, and others. I brought forward all the objections which mature reflection, much reading, and strong prejudices could suggest. I read all the books I could find on the Protestant, and Mr. Martyn furnished me with many on the Catholic side of the question. I weighed evidence against evidence, proof against proof, and, in reading the volumes after volumes which passed under

my eye, I took notes of every thing material ? and if at any time a thought crossed my mind on which I thought I could build an argument in favour of Protestantism, I failed not to mark it down. I wished above all things to prove the Catholic religion false. I prayed daily for divine light on this most important of all subjects ; but in spite of myself, the beam continued to preponderate on the side of the Catholic church. Scripture, history, the language of the fathers, the monuments of ancient times, our very liturgies, festivals, and the venerable and stately fabric of the Catholic church, and the very nature of the Catholic religion itself, conspired to overwhelm me with evidence of her divine authority.

I could not remove from my mind the impressions which the rule of faith had produced. If the Christian religion be divine, thought I, it must be one unchangeable system ; if divine, it must also be of perpetual obligation : and if unchangeable and of perpetual obligation, it must be known ; and if known, there must be a visible church professing it, and invested with perpetual authority to teach it ; and if so, this authority must be infallible, for perpetual unchangeableness cannot be secured without infallible guidance. Day and night, for my nights were sleepless—a voice, not the whisper of peace, but the cry of alarm sounded in my ears—“There must be infallibility somewhere.” The nature of truth requires it—the dissensions of sects require it—your own uneasiness and incertitude of mind require it. It is in the scripture, I replied, with trepidation. But this was the very point in question—the fruitful cause of all my uneasiness. What is the sense of the Holy Ghost, and where is the infallible expositor ? Resolved to leave no stone unturned that might impede my progress after truth, I formed an acquaintance with a clergyman of the established church. This gentleman was most affable and kind to me, and manifested a sincere and anxious desire to give me any information ; expressing his hopes that my difficulties on the Catholic religion would be removed, and I should find that security which I was seeking in the Church of England. To his kindness I am indebted for the loan of books, among which I read with great interest, Wheatley on the Book of Common Prayer, and Bishop Marsh’s Comparative View of the Churches of England and Rome ; and I here publicly thank him for his kindness. Although his arguments did not satisfy me, and as such his labours were lost, yet I am sure they were undertaken in the spirit of Christian charity, and I shall always bear a kind remembrance of them. The rev. gentleman

spoke much on the Dissenters and Mr. Wesley—thought he was a good man, but misled—regretted that the Methodists did not follow his rules, and laboured to show me the errors of the Dissenters in general, in rejecting the authority of the Church of England. But all his arguments against the Dissenters were formed on Catholic grounds. He also lent me a pamphlet, called “Why am I a Churchman?” But every argument of this book was Catholic. His books therefore confirmed my doubts, and when I expressed them, his answers were so confused and weak that they astonished me. When he condemned the Dissenters, I seized the Reformers by the beard and dragged them to his view. When he vindicated the Reformers on the ground of private judgment, and the supposed errors of the Catholic Church, I vindicated the Dissenters on the same principle. He strove to make the parallel lines meet, by shewing that the Dissenters had a right to their private judgment, but had no right to leave the church. I did not at that time know the mathematical position, that two parallel lines can never beset each other; however, I proved it to him in a simpler way—I told him this was like telling a man he had a right to open his eyes, but had no right to see with them. That truth was necessary to his salvation, but he had no right to seek it. I proved to him, that to maintain church authority, he must also maintain infallibility, or every one that did not like authority (and there are few that do) would slip from under it, and he would be driven to the inconsistency and injustice of forcing a man to follow a guide who he believes in his conscience will lead him to hell. And I shewed him that, supposing for a moment his argument to be good, it would equally tell against the Reformers as against the Dissenters. Again, on the subject of unity in the church, he confessed that a centre of unity would have been a wise provision, but he was driven to the dire necessity of declaring that the Divine Founder of the church had not acted thus wisely.—Reader, if thou art astonished, do not blame the man, but pity a religion which stands in need of such miserable support. We have heard the same in substance asserted in full at Sanhedrim lately, by that doughty knight, Mr. Burnett, and received by an admiring multitude as the oracle of the Holy Ghost.

From what has been said, the candid reader will discover a wide difference between the minister of the Reformation, and my antagonist of the Catholic church. How shuffling, inconclusive, and foolish the one; how close, cogent, and

conclusive the other. But this did not arise from the bad talents of the former, but from the badness of his cause. "Error is always inconsistent." By this time every man of conscience and sound mind will perceive, that my means of information were not few, and that I did not submit to a change of principle without the most laboured investigation and positive proof. And what will such readers, for such readers are the only persons whose opinion I value—what will such readers think of Mr. Jewett and his open insinuation, that I became a Catholic for bread. I should be sorry to make such a charge against Mr. Jewett or Mr. Chettle, or any other Methodist preacher, although I might do it with much greater reason, as every one knows who is intimately acquainted with the system of Methodism, and as I have experienced at the expense of my purse for many years. However, I have learned to trample such charges under my feet, to consider them the best arguments of the weakness of their cause, and from the pinnacle of my integrity to look down with pity and regret upon the man who is so devoid of principle as to make them. And, indeed, what benefit can the Catholic religion derive, or what profit can the person himself hope for, who becomes a member of the Catholic church without conviction? He closes up all the avenues of worldly greatness or friendship, and he incurs the torment of a guilty conscience, and an awful prospect of the divine vengeance for ever.

As the controversy proceeded my mind became increasingly uneasy. I became convinced that the rule of faith was the word of God, as taught by the church of God. I saw there could not be unity of faith without divine authority, nor infallible knowledge of this faith, except the authority teaching it be infallible. I saw that every generation of man need the same means of knowing the truth as the church in the apostolic age, and that this could not be the case, unless the church teaching it was visible, infallible, and indefectible.

Another thing which flashed conviction on my mind was, that wherever the church of God exists, it is the duty of every human being, as far as possible, to be a member of it; and this obligation must be a doctrine of this church, since she must teach all necessary truths. Now, I asked, am I obliged, as a matter of salvation to be a Methodist? I am not. Of any other sect? No. None of them pretend this obligation, and yet if they were the church of God they must pretend it. On the contrary, the fact that Protestants do not

pretend any obligation, but tell a man he may be saved without being a Methodist, or Calvinist, or of any other sect; this would go to prove that a man may be saved without being a member of the church of God. I also saw that the doctrine of Justification, and works done before Justification, as taught by the Methodists, was very defective. I saw considerable contradictions in the doctrines taught by their preachers, particularly in the direct witness of the Spirit, Christian perfection, baptism, and others. I saw that the most ignorant of men were constituted teachers to the disgust of the sensible; the scandal of the sober-minded, and the disgrace of religion. And now my situation became as delicate as it was distressing. I durst not open my mind to my family, because of the trouble in which it would involve them. If I looked around me, all was doubt and uncertainty. If I looked into futurity, all was dark and ominous. To stay where I am, said I, is dangerous, if not destructive, To go into the Catholic church is ruin to my character, my peace, and perhaps my prospects in the world.—Nor do I like the Catholic church. In point of friendly intercourse and personal convenience, I prefer Methodism to every other people. Much doubt also seem to hang over the Catholic Church. I hate tyranny, said I to myself, and I expect it—I love liberty, and I shall find bondage—I detest foppery and superstition, and yet I must entangle myself in its trammels and crouch to its trumpery. All my relations and dearest friends were Methodists, and yet I must abandon them all. Thus here I was admiring, yet hating—believing, yet doubting—seeking, and yet wishing to fly from the knowledge of the truth. Reader, if thou hast a soul to think, or a heart to feel, even shouldst thou blame my conduct thou wilt pity my distress. My days were spent in anxious thought, my nights in sleepless agitation. Not to listen to the dictates of my conscience was to compromise my salvation, and rush headlong into the pit of perdition. On the other hand, to follow the guidance of this monitor, was to launch on a sea of calamity, of which I knew neither bottom nor shore.

I had enjoyed much happiness in Methodism from ignorance of Catholicity, and the persuasion I felt that Methodists were the people of God. Its principles had been amalgamated with my nature, and its children had been to me the excellent of the earth; but now all must be sacrificed. All the social and domestic enjoyments of life—old friends, old habits, old views and associations, yea, the very order and constitution of my nature, it would seem, must be revolution-

ized, and give place to others, of which I was a complete stranger. Add to all this, the peace of an aged parent would be broken, her latter days rendered miserable, and to me would belong the bitter reproach—you have brought down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. In looking over my papers, I find the copy of a letter written to Mr. Martyn at this time; in which I express my feelings in a pathos which the contending emotions of my mind would naturally produce. In answer I received the following letter from my Rev. Friend:—

St. Thomas's, Jan. 16, 1819.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am well aware of the state of mind in which you must now be, as well as of the difficulties that attend the sacrifice which Almighty God calls for at your hands. Most sincerely do I enter into your feelings, and most earnestly do I beg of the Father of Mercies that you may be strengthened in the Lord, and in the power of his might. That the same divine arm which fixes upon the shoulders of his creatures the burthen of trial designed for their purification and perfection, will also communicate strength to bear it; and He, who is Almighty, after that he has tried you according to his good will, will himself confirm and establish you; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. The cause of your present uneasiness ought, at the same time, to be the cause of much inward joy and interior consolation. Cry out with the Royal Prophet, “Who am I, O Lord, that thou art mindful of me?” Who am I, that while so many of my fellow-creatures, far more deserving than myself, are left in the mazes of error, I should be singled out as the object of the favour of my God, enlightened with the knowledge of his truth, and conducted into the one fold of the one Shepherd; to be fed with the rich pastures of his divine grace here, and to be made partaker of the riches of his glory hereafter? What return can I make to the Lord for all that he has done for me? Shall I refuse him the full and unreserved sacrifice which he calls for of my heart, my life, my strength, my affections, and my all? Will not the friendship of my Creator in this life, and the possession of him in the life to come, amply recompense me for every sacrifice which I am now to make to him? Shall I balance for one moment which to choose, earth or heaven; the esteem of men, or the favour of my God; the breath of sinners, or the inward testimony of an approving conscience? Oh; my dear friend, cast yourself in spirit at the feet of your agonizing Saviour; meditate on the above sentiments, and offer to your suffering Jesus the spontaneous effusions of a heart truly grateful for his mercy, and determined to unite itself for ever to him. The difficulties which now present themselves to your view in the way of your spiritual welfare will appear for less in the moment of trial than they now appear to be.

I am sorry to be obliged to break off, but am called to a person dangerously ill. However, I shall be, with God's leave, at Walsall on Tuesday next, and will then satisfy you as to each of the points contained in your letter. I remain, dear Sir, your sincere friend in Christ,

FRANCIS MARTYN.

In the midst of all these outward fightings and inward fears, I was not without my suspicions that there were certain unknown mysteries of iniquity in the Catholic church,

which could not be discovered until initiated or developed but by sad experience, and that it was likely I should repent my credulity when too late. No wonder, therefore, I was tardy in resolving, and carried with me a wounded spirit, which could only find solace in tears and fortitude in prayer. When every other prop was gone, and when, like Noah's dove, I found all around me one wide wilderness of water, without an inch of ground on which to set my foot, I caught with convulsive grasp the floating twigs of certain scripture sentences, to which I clung the firmer as my danger appeared to increase. "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature." Then I argued back again, Methodists are new creatures, therefore in Christ; but I forgot that this was a *petitio principii*, founded upon another error called a *non causa pro causa*. "No man can call Jesus Lord but by the Holy Ghost;" but Methodists call Jesus Lord, therefore it is by the Holy Ghost. "Circumcision or uncircumcision availeth not any thing but a new creature;" therefore, it matters not to what sect a man belongs, if he be a new creature. "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can an evil tree bring forth good fruit;" but Catholics lead bad lives, therefore the tree is bad—Methodists lead good lives, therefore the tree is good. I sent all these reasonings to Mr. Martyn, and received an answer. The texts were true; the arguments false. 1st. I assumed too much, when I assumed that the Methodists were the new creatures spoken of, for this was not proved. It was true that all who were in Christ, whether by baptism, regeneration, or justifying grace, were new creatures. But all were not new creatures who pretended to be such; there were apples of Sodom, gilded toys, painted sepulchres, proud Pharisees, praying long and often, saying, "O God, I thank thee I am not as other men," who were condemned as hypocrites. And other sects besides the Methodists pretended to this new creation whom I had before condemned as erring, not knowing the scriptures nor the powers of God. The Deists prided themselves in their morality, and dared them to the proof who impugned it. 2nd. No man could make an act of faith in the divinity of Jesus Christ but by the Holy Ghost teaching through the medium of the church. Hence those who renounce the infallible authority of the church, cannot make this act of faith. What they are said to believe is all opinion, and private opinion too, inasmuch as it would not be held, did not their private judgment receive it. But opinions are not faith—the deductions of private judgment are not faith—nor can they

make an act of faith, for this reason, the point rests upon no divine testimony infallibly given, but upon poor fickle private judgment, ever changing in themselves, and opposed by the private judgment of all Arians, Socinians, Deists, and Infidels of every stamp, who have ever been, now are, or ever will be, in the world. Even Methodists, therefore, cannot call Jesus Lord by the Holy Ghost. To the 3rd, it was sufficient to say—if circumcision availeth nothing, why was it commanded by God? If uncircumcision avail nothing, why are you not circumcised? All that can be gathered from the text is, that Jews and Gentiles are equally eligible to the Christian faith and its benefits, and that no person will be saved by a mere profession of it without a possession of its virtues. And this is the doctrine of the Catholic church. But your interpretation, Mr. Mason, places the Jew and Gentile, the Mahomedan and Christian, on equal ground, providing they become virtuous, which is directly in the teeth of your former assertions. Your conclusions are equally false as to the last cited passage. Pray, Sir, can there be false Christians in the Methodist Society? There may. Then those persons are bad fruit, consequently the tree is bad. But you will say Methodism does not produce this fruit. I can say the same of Catholicity with much greater truth; for the Catholic religion is the religion of God, and cannot possibly make bad Christians; but Methodism is a false religion, and therefore may and must produce bad fruit. Our divine Redeemer likens his church to a net cast into the sea, including fishes good and bad: to a field having tares and wheat; good seed was sown by the master, but an enemy sowed tares. After all, we must not take Protestants for judges of Catholic virtue, for all the actions of Catholics are viewed with a jaundiced eye, and their very virtues transformed into vices.

In the midst of these exercises, a circumstance arose which brought the business to a more speedy close than it probably would have done. From an early period a report had prevailed that a controversy existed between me and the Catholic priest. Frequent inquiries were made by the people whom I visited, as to its nature and probable issue. My answers were such as truth and prudence mutually dictated. At first I would tell them, there is no danger of the priest converting me; but he is a sensible man, and I think we have had some unfounded notions of the Catholic religion. At a later period, when I heard Catholics charged with doctrines or practices which I knew to be false, I vindicated

them. Such conduct was sure to be censured by a bigotted and ignorant people, who thought nothing too bad to be true of Papists; and every one an enemy of Protestantism who would not violate his conscience by telling lies of the Catholic religion. Mr. Jewett says, I have told lies of Methodism in my Appeal. I dare him to the proof. It is possible a man may mistake a fact; but I am not conscious of a single misstatement. And I remind him that lies will never serve any cause, much less to force a man to tell lies against his conscience.

Well, such was the case; and now I was reported as leaning towards Catholicity; then I was half a Catholic; and, finally, great doubts were entertained whether or not I should stand my ground.

This soon reached the ears of my superintendent, who answered the person who carried the news, "I will as soon believe Mr. Mason will become a pig's foot as a Catholic." He visited me and inquired into the state of the case. I laid before him the cause of the controversy, its progress, and my views respecting it. I told him there was certainly much to be done before I could become a Catholic; still I was convinced they were a much-injured and misrepresented people. He expressed his fears on my account, cautioned me against reading their books, and proposed for my consideration, Mr. Wesley's "Popery Calmly Considered." I promised to read the book with attention, and we parted in friendly terms.

That I might give each side due justice, I took Mr. Wesley in one hand, and the Catholic Catechism in the other; judging that if any book was likely to give the Catholic religion as truly taught by that people, it was their own Catechism, where their doctrines are laid down in a simple style suited to the capacity of children.

I soon found a number of contradictions. I will give one as a sample of the rest. Mr. Wesley says, that the Catholic church teaches that contrition is not necessary for the pardon of sin. That if a person, from a fear of hell alone, confesses his sins to the priest, this is sufficient. I immediately turned to the Catechism, and here I found the first thing required was contrition. "What are the parts of penance? Contrition, confession, and satisfaction. What is contrition? A hearty sorrow for having offended so good a God, with a firm purpose of amendment." I must have been wilfully blind and perversely determined upon falsehood, not to see and acknowledge the flat contradiction here given to Wesley. I compared the whole, and found many other mis-

statements : and I advise every sincere inquirer after truth to adopt the same plan, and they will constantly find the most glaring falsehoods, wickedly invented, and industriously palmed upon the Catholic church for her genuine doctrines. It is thus that Protestants make up a religion for Catholics, and then set about refuting them : they conjure up phantoms, and then fly from the work of their own hands. Reader, if thou regardest either thy conscience or thy God, thou wilt read both sides ; examine the Catholic religion in its authorized channels, and give each an impartial investigation.

In a short time the superitendent visited me again, and inquired if I had read the book ? I answered I had, and found many misstatements. He was angry, and said, " Mr. Wesley was an aged man, a learned man, a pious man, and a sound divine, and must know the Catholic religion better than I." That may be, I replied, but he did not know it better than the Catholic church herself : now here is the Catholic Catechism contradicting such and such statements, and if ever the Catholics are to be believed, it must be in teaching their own children the rudiments of their religion. He said, " I ought to submit my judgment to such a man as Mr. Wesley." I replied, why did you wish me to read the book, if not able to judge of its contents ? Besides, I have always understood that private judgment was the birth-right and very foundation of Protestantism, and, if so, there is no reason why I should submit my judgment to that of Mr. Wesley, and much less believe an evident falsehood. He found this reasoning too strong for him, and turned upon me with this sharp rebuff : " Sir, you have got your head into a bag, and I fear you will not get it out again."

The reader will smile at the beautiful metaphor and classical language of my overseer, and be tempted to inquire in what college he learned rhetoric. He enjoined upon me uprightness, and that I would not pervert the people by making the pulpit the vehicle of Popery. I could have answered about the bag, if I can see clearer with my head in the bag than without it, no matter how long I wear it. And if I can find such positive falsehoods out of it, the longer I carry it the better : but I remembered the maxim of the apostle, " Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good ;" and that another had said, " it is more glorious to conquer an enemy by justice than by arms." I therefore told him I did not intend saying any thing about the Catholic religion in the pulpit, but if any person asked me in private company what were my views of the Catholic religion, I should feel

called upon to speak the truth. With this answer he was not satisfied. "Your character," he rejoined, "is already much injured, and your usefulness diminished; to favour the Catholics at all will make you both useless and injurious in our societies." He wished I would consider the subject and come to a final decision in a fortnight, either to give up all further correspondence with Mr. Martyn, and return his books, or resign my office amongst them.

I promised him I would, and appointed that day fortnight for him to dine with me; he accepted the invitation, and departed. If I were troubled before, the tide now rolled its billows over me with redoubled force. The time was short; the work was important, urgent, and alarming. All my difficulties on the Catholic religion were not removed, and yet I knew so much that I could not accede to the proposal with a good conscience. I must either refuse the light of truth, or renounce Methodism. Act against my conscience, or renounce Methodism. Tell all sorts of falsehoods, or renounce Methodism. This places Methodism in a curious point of view, but it is a point of view realized by the experience of others besides myself. The moment a man is disposed to think truly and speak truly of the Catholic church, he is an enemy of Methodism.

This is a most conclusive argument that Methodism is not the truth. If it were, it would love truth, wherever found. The charity of God thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth. If Methodism had this charity, it would rejoice to find itself deceived upon this point, and would make haste to retract its error, and with a voice that would resound to the extremities of the globe, it would proclaim its retraction. But, No; alas! No. To discover this is a crime, almost an unpardonable crime; for never more will you find wonted favour, and you must repent and forsake your crime, or renounce Methodism. Amen! I say. And let all the armies of heaven, and all the kindreds of the earth, say Amen! and let the sentence be engraven with the finger of God, and deposited in the archives of the eternal world. Another truth also is written as with a sunbeam on the forehead of Methodism, and it is this: that she does not exist for the sake of truth, but for her own private purposes, consequently not for the public weal. And a sect among the people making private interest the spring of all its measures, tampering with the passions and prejudices of the people, but flying from the blaze of truth as the owl from the rising sun—such a sect is as dangerous to the best

interests of society, as it is injurious to religion and the souls of men. Of such a sect it may be truly said, it ought to die, and every voice conspire to chaunt its funeral dirge. Mr. Wesley prayed, on one occasion, that if ever Methodism changed, or ceased to answer the ends of truth, God would destroy it. It has changed, and is ever changing, and it ceases to answer the ends of truth. The time is therefore come for the prayer of their prophet to be realized and his malediction accomplished. But to proceed.

Even at this period my heart was not so obdurate, my conscience not so deaf to the calls of duty, as thus lightly to prostitute my principles, and sacrifice my soul at the shrine of falsehood and defamation. I seemed to hear the voice of the great Jehovah from the burning mount sounding in my ears: "THOU SHALT NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS AGAINST THY NEIGHBOUR." And those other words of the Christian Lawgiver, pointing out the way in which I ought to walk: "Whoever shall confess me before man, him will I confess before my Father who is in heaven: but whosoever shall deny me before man, him also will I deny before my Father who is in heaven. He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me: he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me: he that taketh not up his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." *St. Matt.*, x. 32nd to 39th verse. Here let me remark—how awful are these words in regard to those Catholics who are temporizing in their religion, or sacrificing it for the hollow smiles or paltry gains of this deluded and deluding world! Oh! how dearly do they purchase the few comforts of life! It is with the loss of their God and their immortal souls. Let not such deceive themselves with the hope of a death-bed repentance. He that will sacrifice his conscience and his God as long as he can, will be most justly abandoned by his Maker when he can sin no longer.

These considerations fixed my resolution to resign my office and name of Methodist, and in this disposition I waited the appointed day. The superintendent came at the time, and we dined together in a friendly manner. After the cloth was drawn, we entered upon the disagreeable business. He hoped I had come to a firm resolution to give up all further correspondence with Mr. Martyn. I answered, I had considered the subject maturely, although I was not satisfied with every point of the Catholic religion—yet, I was so far dissatisfied with myself and Methodism, that I felt obliged to abandon it. I assured him it was a severe stroke to my

own feelings, and would be to my family and all my friends ; but conscience pointed out the line of conduct I was pursuing as the only one that could give me satisfaction at my dying hour. I, therefore, with firmness and resolution, but not without a tear, gave him my plan, my class-paper, and all the money I had of the society, and desired he would erase my name from the records of their body ; at the same time presenting to him a letter which I had addressed to the quarterly meeting of preachers, explanatory of my reasons. This was an unexpected stroke. I was likely now to become a Catholic without changing my form and nature into that of a pig's foot. He appeared astonished, and expressed his grief and surprise. I told him I would not after all become a Catholic till every point was cleared up to my satisfaction. I might, perhaps, go back to the church of England, or join some other sect ; but I was resolved not to become a member of any body of Christians which would oblige me to speak evil of the Catholic church in things which I knew were false. "O! (he exclaimed) you are sure to become a Catholic, and I had rather you become any thing else." I replied, "Sir, you astonish me. Here are Arians, Socinians, Deists, who deny the divinity and atonement of Christ, and yet you would rather I became one of these than go back to that church, which has existed from the beginning, and which Dr. Adam Clark says, 'has been the bulwark of these essential doctrines in every age.'" I wished to know from him the grounds of this rooted antipathy. Had he proved any peculiar wickedness in the doctrines or economy of that church? He acknowledged he had not, as he did not know much of them ; and if my memory serve me, he confessed that, in his juvenile days, he lived in a Catholic family, and, though he disliked their religion, he was edified by their conduct. I do not intend by this to reflect any dishonour upon my venerable friend ; he was an apple tree among the trees of the wood. I liked him much, and still cherish a regard for his memory. It was not the man, but the system that was to be blamed. I have been the same myself ; I hated the religion of my Catholic friend, though I respected the man ; and the same thing is constantly said of certain priests. Such an one is a gentleman, an amiable companion, a very good kind of man—but he is a Catholic priest. It is said by Mr. Jewett that I was not respected by the Methodists. I never like a man to praise himself, for Solomon says, "let another man praise thee." I will here comply with what appears as much an injunction as a piece of counsel. At

the close of the conference with my superintendant, he drew from his pocket a letter which he had been requested by a neighbouring congregation to present to me, requesting me to preach a funeral sermon for them, and offering to get my other appointment supplied. This is not common but to preachers who are respected. I requested him to say for me, "I was obliged to them for their choice of me, for the purpose specified in their letter, but I had ceased to be a Methodist preacher." This same man wrote to me some time after upon some business, and styled me, "My dear Mason." This savours a little of respect from the very man whose advice and authority I had rejected. I also received a letter from another preacher, Mr. Cloake, who uses it as an argument to bring me back. "You know, my dear friend, in what esteem you were held among us, and you ought not lightly to throw away your old friends." I could give other testimonies, but will leave them to another opportunity.

Thus ended this remarkable meeting. But how can I describe the consternation and distress of my family? My mother, who kept my house, and my sister, who was come to meet the preacher, were both overwhelmed with grief, and, hanging on the preacher as children on a parent, poured forth their lamentations over my supposed folly, with bitter invectives against the man whom they considered as the author of my ruin. He comforted them with the hope that I should still see my error, and exhorted them to pray that God would give me the grace of repentance. And now I had swarms of Methodists about me continually, some pitying my fall, others chiding my folly—here was one groaning in the spirit, there another sighing for my salvation—a third laughs with simpering jeer at the droll figure I should cut creeping round the Catholic chapel on my bare-boned bleeding knees, in penance for my heresy. And to complete the motley group, an old friend lifts his arm to heaven over my devoted head, and proclaims, by the prophetic spirit, a curse on me and my posterity for ever. Numerous reports were in speedy circulation, some detracting my moral character, others accounting for my motives. One lifts his eyes and hands to heaven and declares I am bewitched, not by a she witch, but a he witch. A second, with disdainful mien, declares disappointment to be the cause. A third, with hymeneal glee, discovers that a matrimonial connexion had induced the change. A fourth, wiser than the former, found out that one hundred shining guineas was the precious bribe.

But the greater part with sullen aspects stroked their beards, and muttered forth their fears that I had fallen from grace, and was given up to dire apostacy by the awful judgment of an irritated God. One time I was seen drunk, another I was singing songs on the ale bench; and, by another party, a wager was laid that I should be seen on the race-ground the next races. Meanwhile I sat, like Jack aloft, laughing at the storm below.

As soon as these things had transpired, I acquainted Mr. Martyn with the whole. He diligently laboured to solve my remaining doubts, and in the end I expressed my satisfaction, and yielded myself up a postulate for Catholic communion. After being instructed in the sacraments and other necessary points of Catholic doctrine, I made my profession of faith, and was received into the one fold of the one Shepherd on the 12th of March, 1819. On Sunday, the 21st, I received the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist at the hands of my reverend friend, and was confirmed the same day, at the altar of St. Thomas's chapel, Bloxwich, by the venerable and learned prelate, Dr. Milner.

Here I would drop my pen, did not the glory of God, the honour of the Catholic religion, and the welfare of the thousands around me, who are bewildered in the mazes of error, require me to say something as to the effects which followed my conversion. My aged parent continued inconsolable for a long time, eating her food with bitterness, and mingling her drink with tears. But being one day in company with one of the preachers at the house of a Methodist, the conversation turned upon my conversion to Catholicity; and as the preacher was considered a man of wisdom and authority, she asked him whether or not I could obtain salvation in the Catholic church? He answered, without any hesitation, "Certainly I believe he can." This eased her mind so far; for she reasoned, if he can be saved in the Catholic church, he is as safe as in Methodism. Why, therefore, should he not follow his conscience, and be saved? And will not his following the dictates of his conscience, in a religion where salvation is attainable, be more likely to secure his salvation, than to remain in Methodism contrary to his conscience? Such reasoning was as just as it was salutary. It paved the way to further inquiry. It hushed her fears, and rendered her accessible to the influence of reason and reasonable conversation. But, although she was more satisfied in regard to myself, nothing could persuade her that Methodism was wrong. My sister also

was violently opposed to the Catholic religion, and all subjects connected with it. She would not hear them named in her presence. I continued to labour as far as practicable for their salvation; expounding to them the Catholic faith, combatting their prejudices, and, when any controversial work came out against my religion, I seized it, and exposed to them its errors and defects. About this time Mr. Jacob Stanley wrote his book against the Reverend Mr. Tysan, called "Popery Indefensible." I purchased it, and wrote a series of letters to my friends upon it, exposing its follies, circumstances and falsehoods. This line of conduct, during six or seven years, caused their prejudices to give way. They now began to read and examine for themselves; and the result is, that my mother and sister and her husband, a sensible and respectable preacher, have been converted to the Catholic religion: several others also, not connected by family ties, have been added to the church.

And now I have only to assure the candid reader, who may be anxious to know my present state of mind, after so long a period of cool reflection and practical experience, that, on reviewing the steps I have taken in all their bearings, I am completely satisfied of their propriety and safety, when viewed in connexion with another world. There may be some things in the conduct of some Catholics which I could wish were not so, but these things are human frailties. And what is human in the Catholic church is as liable to defect as human things out of the church. But whoever embraces the Catholic religion, will know of its doctrines and economy, that they are of God; and every such person living in obedience to the duties which his church enjoins, cultivating the dispositions which she requires, and possessing the blessing which she imparts, will enjoy solid peace and permanent happiness.

In conclusion, I cannot sufficiently express my gratitude to the God of all grace, who has brought me out of darkness into this marvellous light, and appointed me, the most unworthy, to minister at his holy altar, and to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. "To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be glory, dominion, and praise in the universal Church, world without end. Amen."

J. A. MASON.

Stourbridge, September 26, 1827.

